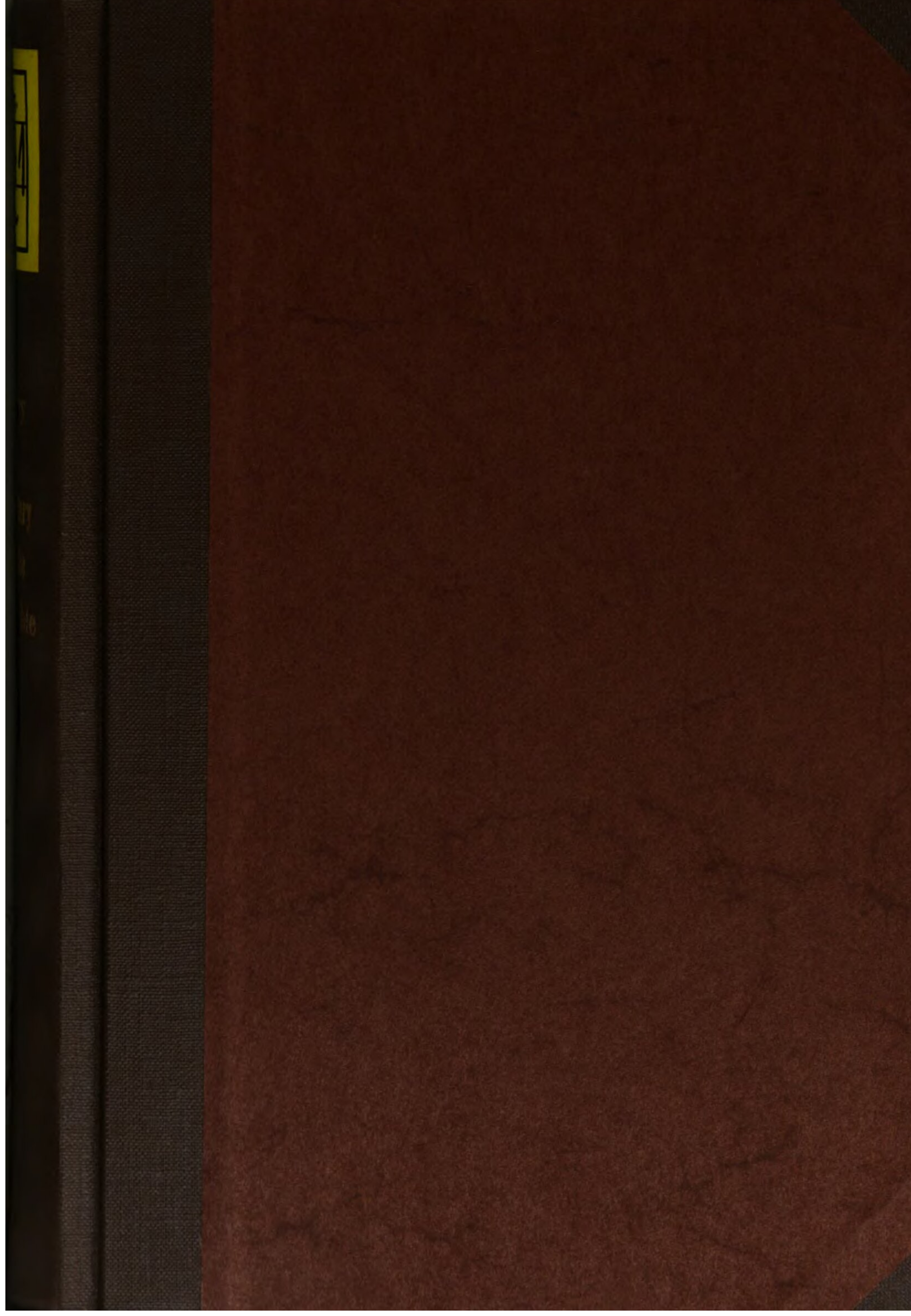




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COMPTON

THE HOUSE

OF COMMONS

AND A MEMORIAL OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
ALSO A MEMORIAL OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

OF THE HOUSE

A
COMMENTARY
UPON
THE HOLY BIBLE,
FROM
HENRY AND SCOTT;

WITH NUMEROUS OBSERVATIONS AND NOTES FROM OTHER WRITERS;
ALSO MAPS OF THE COUNTRIES MENTIONED IN SCRIPTURE,
AND VARIOUS USEFUL TABLES.

JOSHUA TO ESTHER.

LONDON:
THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY,

INSTITUTED A. D. 1799.

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COMMENTARY

THE HOLY BIBLE



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GENERAL REMARKS

ON

THE HISTORICAL BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

THE historical books of scripture—from Joshua to Nehemiah—contain the history of the Jewish church and nation, from their first settlement in the promised land, after their bondage in Egypt, and their wandering in the wilderness, to their resettlement there after their captivity in Babylon. The five books of Moses were taken up more with their laws, institutes, and charters; but all these books are historical, and a great deal of very valuable learning and wisdom has therein been conveyed from one generation to another.

As to the particular chronological difficulties which occur in the thread of this history, there are none so great, but that solutions may be given of them, which are sufficient to silence atheists and opposers of scripture, and to roll away from the sacred records all reproach of contradiction and inconsistency. To do that, it is enough to show that the differences may be accommodated. But these are things about which we may safely be ignorant. What concerns our salvation is plain enough, and we need not perplex ourselves about the *niceties* of chronology, genealogy, or the situation of places. What is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, is for us to observe, and we should endeavour to open what is dark and hard to be understood, in order to that. The sacred penmen, as they have not left us formal systems, so they have not left us formal annals, but useful narratives of things proper for our direction in the way of duty, which are the most pleasant and profitable histories, and most likely to answer the end. The word of God, as one of the ancients expresses it, has enough in it that is easy, to nourish the meanest to life eternal, yet enough that is difficult, to try the industry and humility of the greatest.

Several things recommend this part of sacred writ to our diligent and constant study.

I. It is *history*; and therefore pleasant, edifying, and very serviceable to the conduct of human life. It gratifies the inquisitive with knowledge which the most intense speculation could not discover any other way. By retirement into ourselves, and serious contemplation of the objects we are surrounded with, close reasoning may advance many excellent truths without being beholden to any other. But for the knowledge of past events we are entirely indebted, and must be so, to the reports and records of others. How much then are we indebted to the Divine wisdom and goodness for these writings, which have made things so long since past, as familiar to us as occurrences of the age and place we live in! and whatever may be said of other history, we are sure that in this history there is no matter of fact recorded but what has its use, and will help, either to expound God's providence, or to guide man's prudence.

II. It is *true history*; we may rely upon it, and need not fear being deceived. Of those times respecting which the heathens knew nothing, and the account of which was wholly fabulous, we have most authentic accounts. The Greeks were the most celebrated heathen historians; and yet their successors in learning and dominion, the Romans, considered them as far too credulous, and as inclined to listen to fables. But the history which we have before us is of undoubted certainty, and no cunningly devised fable. To be well assured of this is a great satisfaction, especially since we meet with so many things in it truly miraculous, and many more great and marvellous.

III. It is *ancient history*; far more ancient than ever even pretended to come from any other source. Homer, the most ancient genuine heathen writer now entirely extant, is reckoned to have lived near the time when the city of Rome was founded by Romulus, which was but about the reign of Hezekiah, king of Judah. And his writings claim not to be historical, but are poetical fiction. The most ancient authentic historians now extant are Herodotus and Thucydides, who were contemporaries with the latest of the sacred historians, Ezra and Nehemiah, and they could not write with any certainty of events much before their own time. The obscurity, deficiency, and uncertainty of all ancient history, except that which we find in the scriptures, is abundantly shown by bishop Stillingfleet, (*Origines Sacrae*, lib. 1.) And let the antiquity of this history not only recommend it to the curious, but recommend to us all that way of religion it directs us in, as THE GOOD OLD WAY, in which if we walk, we shall find rest to our souls, Jer. 6. 16.

IV. It is *church history*; the history of the Jewish church, that sacred society, united for religion, and for the custody of the oracles and ordinances of God, by a covenant confirmed by miracles. There were many great and mighty nations at this time in the world, celebrated, it is likely, for wisdom, and learning, and valour, illustrious men, and illustrious actions; yet the records of these are all lost, either in silence or fables, while the inconsiderable nation of the Jews, that dwelt alone, and was not reckoned among the nations, Numb. 23. 9, makes so great a figure in the best known, most ancient, and most lasting of all histories; and no notice is taken in it of the affairs of other nations, except only as they fall in with the affairs of the Jews; for the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob is the lot of his inheritance, Deut. 32. 8, 9; such concern has God for his church in every age, and so dear have its interests been to him. Let them therefore be so to us, that we may be followers of Him as dear children.

V. It is a *Divine history*; given by inspiration of God, and a part of that blessed book which is to be the standing rule of our faith and practice. And we are not to think this history might have been spared, or that we may now pass over it, or cast a careless eye upon these books, as if it were indifferent whether we read them or not; but we are to read them as a sacred record, preserved for our benefit, to whom the ends of the world are come.

1. This history is of great use for understanding some other parts of the Old Testament. The account we have here of David's life and reign, especially of his troubles, is a key to many of his psalms. And much light is given to most of the prophecies by these histories.

2. Though we have not so many types of Christ here as in the history and law of Moses, yet we meet with several who were figures of him that was to come, such as Joshua, Samson, Solomon, Cyrus; but especially David, whose kingdom was typical of the kingdom of the Messiah, and the covenant of royalty made with him, a representation of the covenant of redemption made with the Eternal Word; nor know we how to call Christ the Son of David, unless we are acquainted with this history; nor how to receive it that John Baptist was the Elias that was to come, Matt. 11. 14.

3. The state of the jewish church which is here set before us, was typical of the gospel church, and the state of that in the days of the Messiah; and as the prophecies which related to it looked further, to the latter days, so did the histories of it; and still these things happened to them for ensamples, 1 Cor. 10. 11. By the tenour of this history we are given to understand these three things concerning the church; for the thing that hath been, is that which shall be, Eccl. 1. 9. *First.* That we are not to expect the perfect purity and unity of the church in this world, and therefore not to be stumbled, though we are grieved at its corruptions, distempers, and divisions; not to think concerning them as though some strange thing happened; much less to think the worse of its laws and constitutions for the sake of them, or to despair of its perpetuity. What wretched stains of idolatry, impiety, and immorality appear on the jewish church! and what a woful breach was there between Judah and Ephraim! yet God never wholly rejected them, till they rejected the Messiah. *Second.* That we are not to expect the constant tranquillity and prosperity of the church. It was often oppressed and afflicted from its youth, had its years of servitude, as well as its days of triumph, was often obscured, diminished, impoverished, and brought low, and still God secured to himself a remnant, a holy seed, which was the substance thereof, Isa. 6. 13. Let us not then be surprised to see the gospel church sometimes driven into the wilderness, and the gates of hell prevailing far against it. *Third.* That we need not fear the utter extirpation of it. The gospel church is called the Israel of God, Gal. 6. 16, and the Jerusalem which is above, Gal. 4. 26, the heavenly Jerusalem. For as Israel after the flesh, and the Jerusalem that then was, by the wonderful care of the Divine Providence, outrode all the storms with which they were tossed and threatened, and continued in being, till they were made to resign all their honours to the gospel church, which they were the figures of; so shall that also, notwithstanding all its shocks, be preserved, till the mystery of God shall be finished, and the kingdom of grace has its perfection in the kingdom of glory.

4. This history is of great use to us for our direction in the way of our duty; it was written for our learning, that we may see the evil we should avoid, and be armed against it, and the good we should do, and be quickened to it. Though they are generally judges, and kings, and great men, whose lives are here written, yet in them, even those of the meanest rank may see the deformity of sin, learn to hate it, and perceive the beauty of holiness, and be in love with it; nay, the greater the person is, the more evident are both these; for if the great be good, it is their goodness that makes their greatness honourable; if bad, their greatness does but make their badness the more shameful. The failings even of God's people, are recorded here for our admonition, that he who thinks he stands may take heed lest he fall; and that he who has fallen, may not despair of forgiveness.

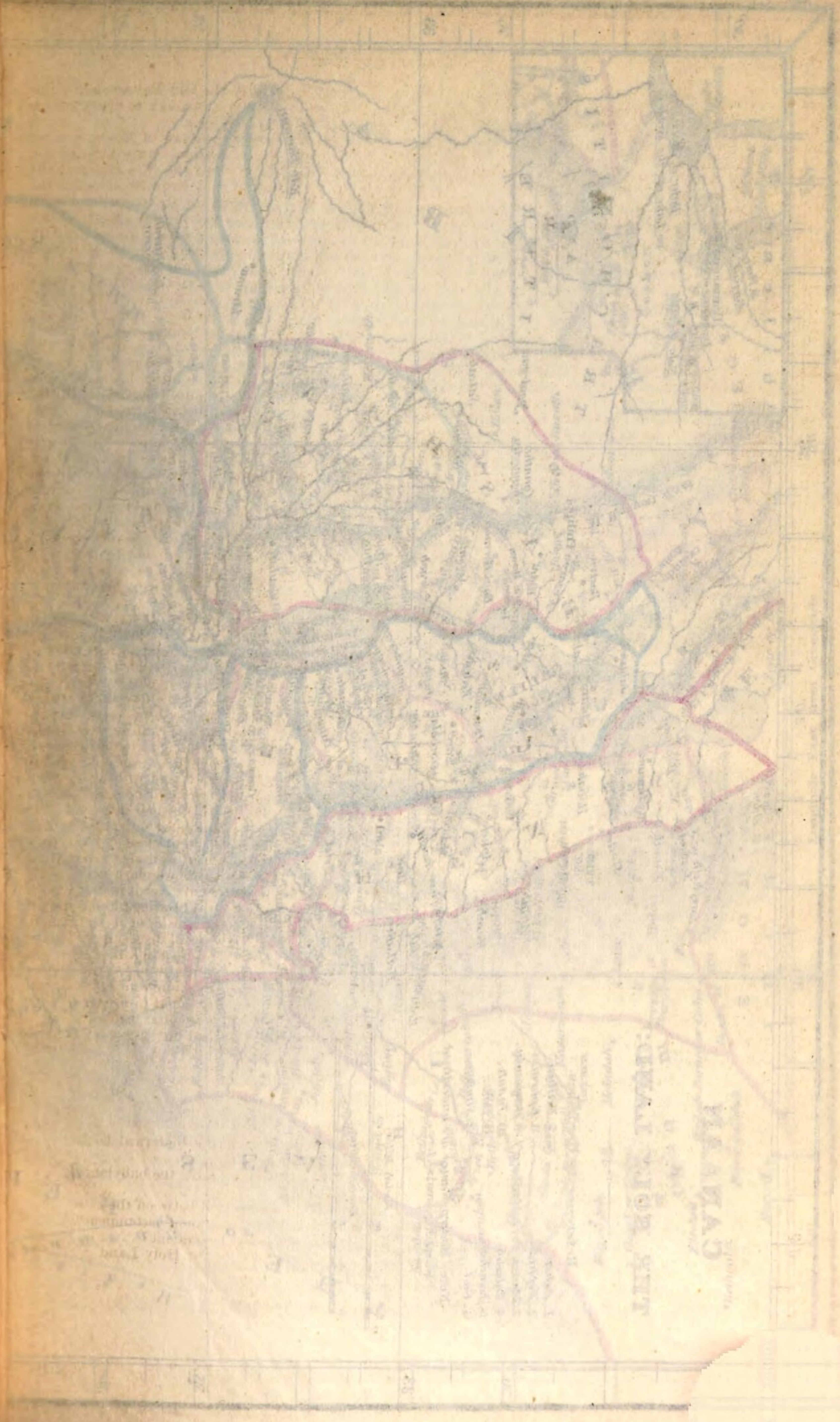
5. This history, as it shows what God requires of us, so it shows what we may expect from his providence, especially concerning states and kingdoms. By the dealings of God with the jewish nation, it appears that as nations are, so they must expect to fare: that while princes and people serve the interests of God's kingdom among men, he will secure and advance their interests; but that when they shake off his government, and rebel against him, they can look for no other than an inundation of judgments. It was so all along with Israel; while they kept close to God, they prospered; when they forsook him, every thing went cross. It has been well suggested, that though, as to particular persons, the providences of God are promiscuously administered in this world, because there is another world of rewards and punishments for them; yet it is not so with nations as such, but national virtues are ordinarily rewarded with temporal blessings, and national sins punished with temporal judgments; because public bodies and communities of men, as such, can be rewarded and punished only in this world. So plainly are God's ways of disposing kingdoms laid before us in this history, that it would be well if christian statesmen would think themselves as much concerned to acquaint themselves with it as preachers are. They might derive far better maxims of state and rules of policy from hence, than from the best of the greek and roman historians. We are blessed, as the jews were, from a Divine revelation, and make a national profession of religion, and relation to God, and therefore are to look upon ourselves as in a peculiar manner under a Divine regimen; so that the things which happened to them, were designed for ensamples to us.—
From Henry.

GENERAL NOTES.

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On the destruction of the canaanites	57	On the variations in the historical books	
On the character of David	229	of scripture	452
Parallel passages of the books of Chroni- cles, Samuel, and Kings	403	The state of the jews after the babylonish captivity	453
Comparative view of the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel	404	Brief view of the period between the close of the Old Testament and the commence- ment of the New Testament	456
Principal dates of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther	452	Canaan, Palestine, or the Holy Land	462

MAP.

Canaan, or the Holy Land, at Joshua i.



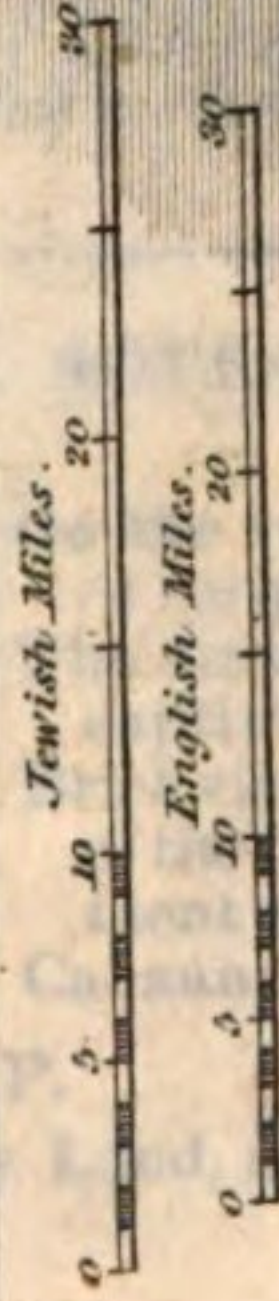
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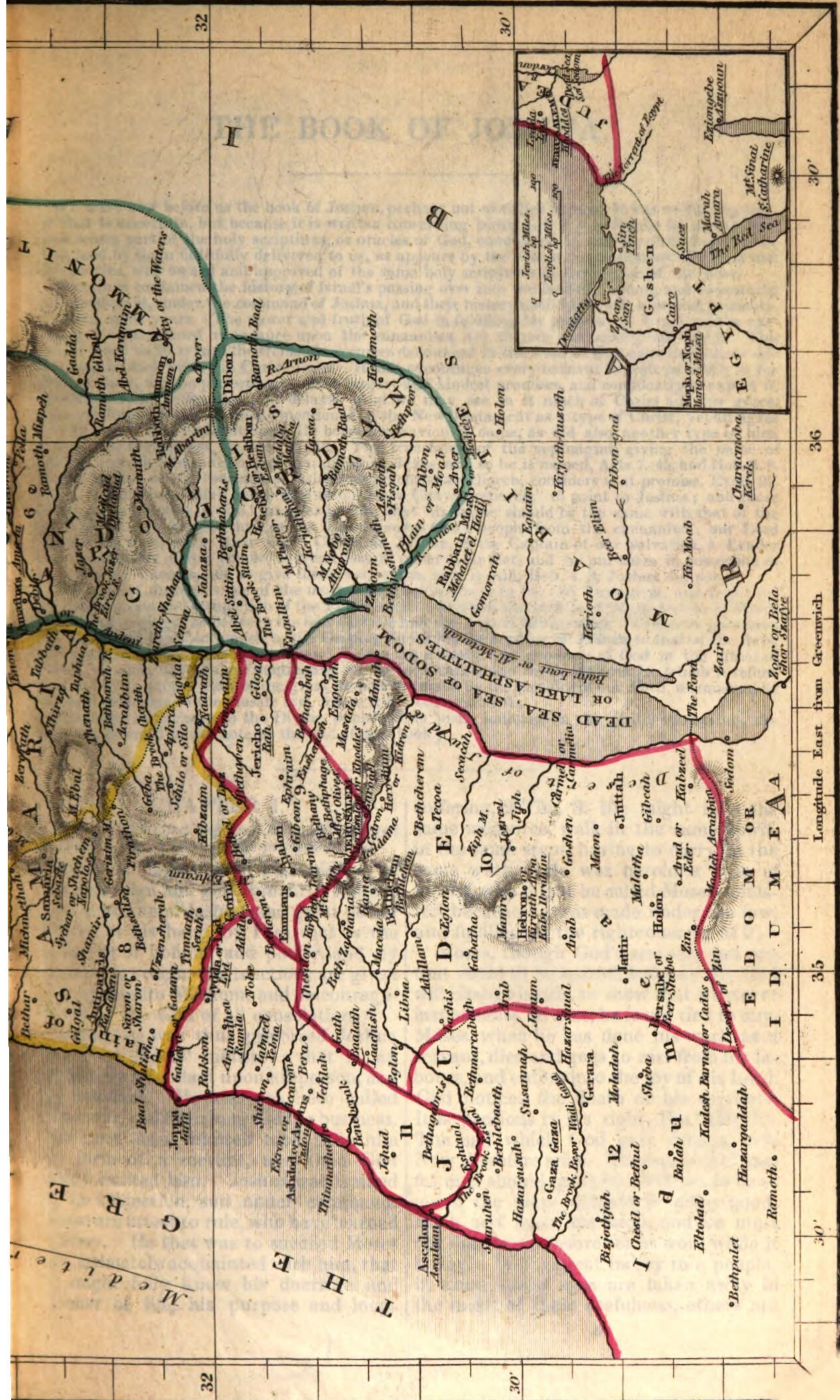
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Reference to the Tribes.

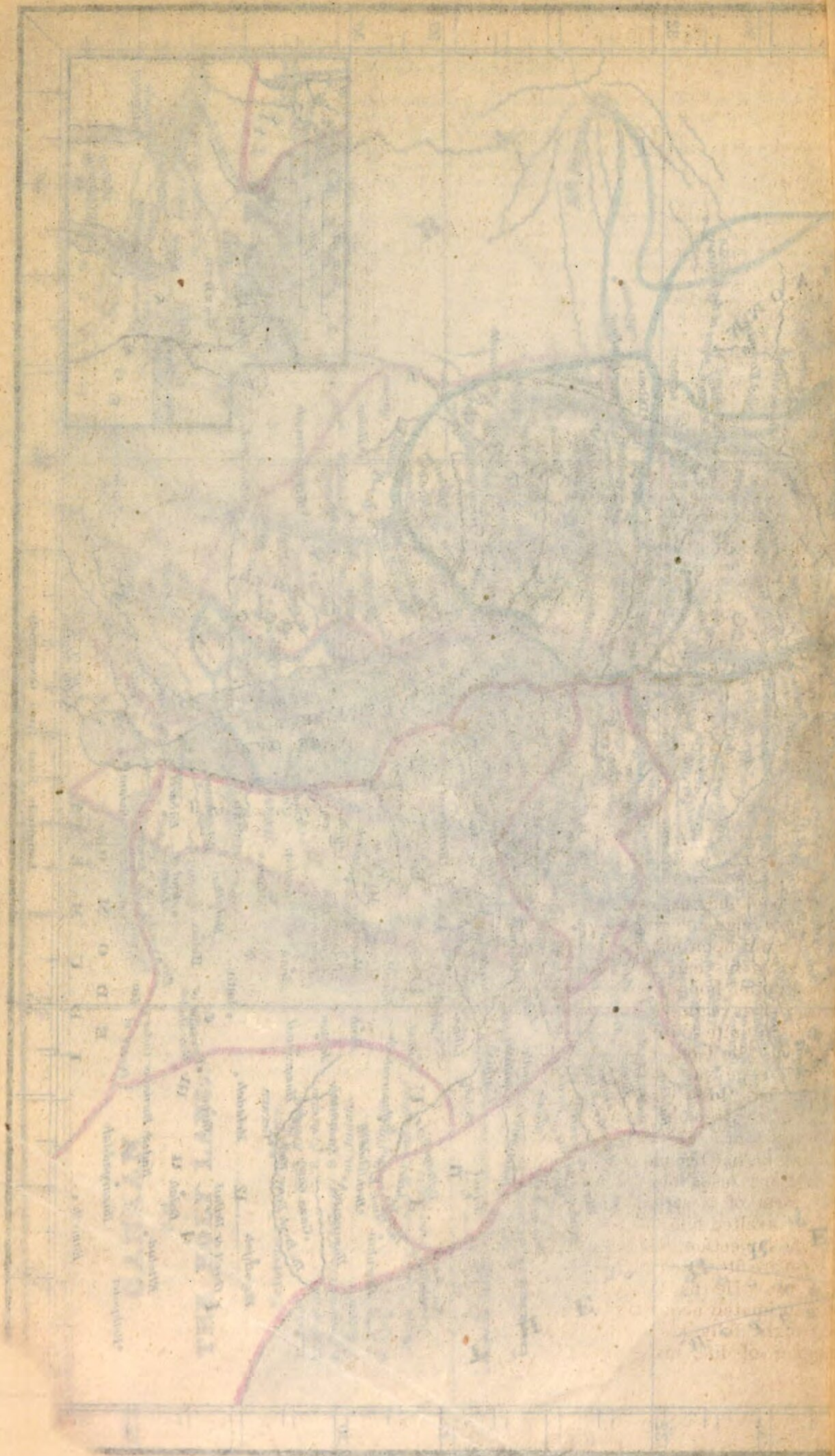
1. <i>Asher.</i>	7. <i>Reuben.</i>
2. <i>Nephthali.</i>	8. <i>Ephraim.</i>
3. <i>Manasseh</i> / <i>half tribes of</i>	9. <i>Benjamin.</i>
4. <i>Zabulon.</i>	10. <i>Judah.</i>
5. <i>Issachar.</i>	11. <i>Dan.</i>
6. <i>Gad.</i>	12. <i>Simeon.</i>

Note. *Modern Names are underlined as Ptolemais Acre.*





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THE BOOK OF JOSHUA.

We have now before us the book of Joshua, perhaps not so called because it was written by him, for that is uncertain, but because it is written concerning him; and it is sufficient for us that this book was a part of the holy scriptures, or oracles of God, committed to, and carefully kept by the jews, and by them faithfully delivered to us, as appears by the concurring testimony of Christ and his apostles, who owned and approved of the same holy scriptures as the church of the jews.

Therein is contained the history of Israel's passing over into the land of Canaan, and conquering and dividing it, under the command of Joshua, and their history until his death, a period, probably, of about eight years. The power and truth of God in fulfilling his promises to Israel, and in executing his threatened vengeance upon the canaanites, are therein wonderfully displayed. This should teach us to regard the tremendous curses denounced in the word of God upon impenitent sinners, and to seek refuge in Christ Jesus. It also encourages every believer to wait patiently in the path of duty, for the performance of his largest and kindest promises, and confidently to expect it, notwithstanding difficulties and delays. And we may see in it much of Christ and his grace. Though Joshua is not expressly mentioned in the New Testament as a type of Christ, yet all agree that he was a very eminent one. He bore our Saviour's name, as did also another type of him, Joshua the high priest, Zech. 6. 11, 12. The translators of the septuagint, giving the name of Joshua a greek termination, call him all along Jesus, and so he is named, Acts 7. 45, and Heb. 4. 8. Justin Martyr, one of the earliest writers of the christian church, considers that promise, Exod. 23. 20, 21, "Mine angel shall bring thee into a place I have prepared," to point to Joshua; and these words, "My name is in him," to refer to this, that his name should be the same with that of the Messiah; it signifies, He shall save. Joshua saves God's people from the canaanites; our Lord Jesus saves them from their sins. Christ, as Joshua, is the Captain of our salvation, a Leader and Commander of the people, to tread Satan under their feet, and to put them in possession of the heavenly Canaan, and to give them rest, which, as it is said, Heb. 4. 8, Joshua did not.

The book of Joshua is one of the most important writings in the Old Testament, and is at once the continuation and completion of the Pentateuch. Between this book and the five books of Moses there is an analogy, as between the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. Whoever goes from the reading of the Pentateuch to the Gospels, and from the reading of Joshua to that of the Acts, will carry with him great advantages. To see the wisdom and goodness of God in the ritual of Moses, we must have an eye continually on the incarnation and death of Christ, to which it refers. And to have a proper view of the great atonement made by the sacrifice of our Lord, we must make constant reference to the mosaic law, where it is shadowed forth.

(For some remarks as to the Divine punishments justly inflicted on the guilty canaanites, the reader is referred to the note at the end of this book.)

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1—4. *The Lord appoints Joshua to succeed Moses—The borders of the promised land.*

THIS book begins with the history of Joshua's reign and government. Honour is here put upon Joshua, and great power lodged in his hand, by Him that is the Fountain of honour and power, and by whom kings reign. Instructions are given him by infinite Wisdom, and encouragements by the God of all consolation.

Before he was thus preferred Joshua had been Moses' minister; that is, an immediate attendant upon his person, and his assistant. He who was here called to honour, had been long used to business. Our Lord Jesus himself took upon him the form of a servant, and then God highly exalted him. Joshua was trained up in subjection, and under command. Those are fittest to rule, who have learned to obey. He that was to succeed Moses was intimately acquainted with him, that he might fully know his doctrine and manner of life, his purpose and long-

suffering, 2 Tim. 3. 10; might take the same measures, walk in the same spirit, in the same steps, having to carry on the same work. He was herein a type of Christ, who might be called Moses' minister, because he was made under the law, and fulfilled all the righteousness of it.

Moses, though God's servant, and one that could ill be spared, is dead; for God will change hands, to show that whatever instruments he uses, he is not tied to any. Moses, when he has done his work as a servant, dies and goes to rest from his labours, and enters into the joy of his Lord. God notices the death of his servants. It is precious in his sight, Psa. 116. 15. The call which God gave Joshua was, Now therefore arise. The removal of useful men should quicken survivors to be so much the more diligent in doing good. Such and such are dead, and we must die shortly, therefore let us work while it is day. It is a great mercy to a people, if, when useful men are taken away in the midst of their usefulness, others are

raised up in their stead; thus the latter generations enter into the labours of the former. And thus Christ, our Joshua, does that for us which could never be done by the law of Moses: He *justifies*, Acts 13. 39, and *sanctifies*, Rom. 8. 3, 4.

The mosaic dispensation was introductory to that of the gospel, and must expire before that could appear in its full glory. The moral law is exceedingly useful to the church of God, and to every believer; but only the gospel can conduct him to the heavenly inheritance. Until we are dead unto the law, as to any dependence on it, or expectation from it, in the concern of justification, we cannot be established in our privileges as believers in Christ. These things are shadowed forth in this typical transaction of Moses' death, ere Joshua (that is, Jesus) could lead the tribes of Israel to Canaan's rest.

Observe the particular service to which Joshua was now called. Arise, go over Jordan, this river, which you have in view, and on the banks of which you lie encamped. This was a trial to the faith of Joshua; there was no visible way of getting over it, at least not at this place and at this time, when all the banks were overflowed, ch. 3. 15. He had no bridge or boats by which to convey the people over, and yet he must believe that God, having ordered them over, would open a way. Going over Jordan was going into Canaan; thither Moses might not, could not bring them, Deut. 31. 2. Thus the honour of bringing the many sons to glory is reserved for Christ, the Captain of our salvation, Heb. 2. 10. The grant of the land of Canaan to the children of Israel is here repeated, ver. 2—4, *I do give it them*. To the patriarchs it was promised, *I will give it*; but now that the fourth generation was expired, the iniquity of the amorites was full, and the time was come for the performance of the promise, it is said, *I have given it*. Though it be yet unconquered, it is as sure to you as if it were in your hands.

1. Joshua the son of Nun, of the tribe of Ephraim, was first called Osheâ, or Hosheâ, Numb. 13. 16, which signifies, Saved, a Saviour, Salvation; but afterwards Moses, guided, no doubt, by a prophetic spirit, changed his name to Yehoshuâ, or Joshuâ, which signifies, He shall save, or, The Salvation of Jehovah, referring, no doubt, to his being God's instrument in saving the people from the hands of their enemies, and leading them from victory to victory, over the different canaanitish nations, till he put them in possession of the promised land.—*A. Clarke*.

4. The Great sea is the Mediterranean.

Ver. 5—9. *God promises to assist Joshua, and gives him instructions, especially concerning the Divine law.*

God here makes promises to Joshua for his encouragement. 1. That he should be sure of the presence of God in this great work to which he was called. As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee. What Moses did, was done by virtue of the presence of God. It is a great comfort to the rising generation of ministers and christians, that the same grace which was sufficient for those who went before them, shall not be wanting to them, if they are not wanting in improving it. It is repeated here again, The Lord thy God is with thee, as a God of power, and that power engaged for thee whithersoever thou goest. Those who go where God sends them, shall have him with them wherever they go, and they need desire no more to make them easy and prosperous. 2. That the presence of God should never be withdrawn from him—I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. The promise here made to Joshua, is applied to all believers, and improved as an argument against covetousness, Heb. 13. 5. Be content with such things as ye have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee. The application of this promise by the apostle, encourages us to expect the performance of every promise in the scripture to ourselves, so that we are real christians, and walking in the Lord's ways—provided their accomplishment would be to our real advantage. 3. That he should have victory over all the enemies of Israel. No man that comes against thee, shall be able to stand before thee. There is no standing before those who have God on their side; If he be for us, who can be against us? Joshua should divide this land among the people of Israel. It was a great encouragement in beginning this work, that he was sure to see it finished; that his labour should not be in vain.

The first charge and command God gives to Joshua is, that he conform himself in every thing to the law of God, and make that his rule. Concerning this he is charged to meditate therein day and night that he might understand it, and have it ready to his mind upon all occasions. If ever any man's business might have excused him from meditation, and other acts of devotion, one would think Joshua's might at this time; yet he must

find time and thoughts for meditation. Whatever affairs of this world we have to mind, we must not neglect the one thing needful. He is not to let it depart out of his mouth; that is, all his orders to the people, and his judgments upon appeals made to him, must be according to the law of God; upon all occasions he must speak according to this rule, Isa. 8. 20. There was no occasion to make new laws, but that good thing which was committed to him, he must carefully and faithfully keep, 2 Tim. 1. 14. He must observe to do according to all this law. To this end he must meditate therein, not for contemplation only, or to fill his head with notions, but that he might, both as a man and as a magistrate, observe to do according to what was written therein; and several things were written there, which had particular reference to the business now before him. Joshua was great in power and authority, yet he must himself be under command; no man's dignity or dominion, how great soever, sets him above the law of God. Joshua must not only govern by law, and take care that the people observe the law, but he must observe it himself, and by his own example maintain its honour and power.

1. He must *do* what was written; it is not enough to hear and read the word, to commend and admire it, and know and remember it, to talk and discourse of it, but we must do it.
2. He must do *according to* what was written, exactly observing the law.
3. He must do according to *all* that was written, without exception or reserve.
4. He must *observe* to do so, observe the checks of conscience, the hints of Providence, and all the advantages of opportunity; careful observance is necessary to universal obedience.
5. He must *not turn from it*, either in his own practice, or in any act of government.
6. He must be *strong and courageous*, that he may do according to the law. There are so many discouragements in the way of duty, that those who will proceed and persevere in it must put on resolution. And, lastly, to encourage him in his obedience, God assures him, that then he shall *do wisely*, and *make his way prosperous*. Those who make the word of God their rule, and conscientiously walk by that rule, shall both do well, and speed well.

The second charge and command is, that he encourage himself with the pro-

mise and presence of God. Joshua had long since signalized his valour, yet God sees fit to inculcate this precept upon him. Those who have grace, need to be called upon again and again to exercise grace and to improve in it. Joshua was humble and low in his own eyes, not distrustful of God, and his power, and promise, but diffident of himself, and of his own wisdom, and strength, and sufficiency for the work, especially coming after so great a man as Moses; therefore God repeats so often, *Be strong, and of a good courage*; let not the sense of thine own infirmities dishearten thee; God is all-sufficient. Have not I commanded thee? I have commanded the work to be done, and therefore it shall be done, how invincible soever the difficulties may seem that lie in the way. I have commanded, called, and commissioned *thee* to do it, and will be sure to own thee and strengthen thee, and to bear thee out in it. When we are in the way of our duty, we have reason to be strong and very courageous; and it will help very much to animate and imbolden us, if we keep our eyes upon the Divine warrant, and hear God saying, Have not I commanded thee? I will, therefore, help thee, succeed thee, accept thee, reward thee. Our Lord Jesus, as Joshua here, was borne up under his sufferings by a regard to the will of God, and the commandment he had received from his Father, John 10. 18.

Ver. 10—15. *Joshua prepares the people to pass over Jordan.*

Joshua immediately applies himself to business, to further the work of God among the people over whom God had set him. As he that desires the office of a minister, 1 Tim. 3. 1, so he that desires the office of a magistrate, desires a work, a good work: neither is he preferred to be idle.

We may easily conclude that Joshua attended to the directions given to him, and encouraged others to do the same. Few generations were more obedient to God than that immediately succeeding the death of Moses, Judg. 2. 7. Though much of this may be attributed to the miracles which they saw, yet many of those miracles were wrought to confirm the law of God, and all of them tended to do so.—(5.)

With confidence Joshua says to the people, Ye shall pass over Jordan, and shall possess the land, because God had said it to him. We greatly honour the

truth of God, when we stagger not at the promise of God. He gives them directions to prepare victuals, not to prepare transport vessels; he that bore them out of Egypt upon eagles' wings, would in like manner bear them into Canaan, to bring them to himself, Exod. 19. 4. But those who were minded to have other victuals beside the manna, which had not yet ceased, must prepare it, and have it ready against the time appointed. He reminds the two tribes and a half of the obligation they were under to go over Jordan with their brethren, though they left their possessions and families on this side. Interest would make the other tribes glad to go over Jordan, but in these it was an act of self-denial. He reminds them of the advantages they had received in being first settled: The Lord your God hath given you rest. When God, by his providence, has given us rest, we ought to consider how we may honour him with the advantages of it, and what service we may do to our brethren who are unsettled, or not so well settled as we are. When God had given David rest, 2 Sam. 7. 1, see how restless he was till he had found out a habitation for the ark, Psa. 132. 4, 5. When God has given us rest, we must take heed of slothfulness, and of settling upon our lees. We all are under manifold obligations to strengthen the hands one of another, not to seek our own welfare only, but each other's.

11. These words, though placed here, seem not to have been delivered by Joshua till after the return of the spies, ch. 2; such transpositions being frequent in scripture.—*Poole*.

Ver. 16—18. *The people promise to obey Joshua.*

This answer was given, not by the two tribes and a half only, but by the officers of all the people as their representatives, concurring with the Divine appointment, by which Joshua was set over them; they did it heartily, and with a great deal of cheerfulness and resolution. 1. They promise him obedience, not only as subjects, but as soldiers. Thus the people of Israel here engage themselves to Joshua; all that thou commandest us to do we will readily do, without murmuring or disputing; and whithersoever thou sendest us, though upon the most difficult and perilous expedition, we will go. We must thus swear allegiance to our Lord Jesus as the Captain of our salvation, and bind ourselves to do what he commands us by his word, and to go whither

he sends us by his providence. 2. They pray for the presence of God with him, ver. 17. Prayers and supplications are to be made for all in authority, 1 Tim. 2. 1, 2. The best we can ask of God for our magistrates, is, that they may have the presence of God; that will make them blessings to us, so in seeking this for them, we consult our own interest. A reason is here intimated, why they would obey him as they had obeyed Moses, because they believed, and in faith prayed that God's presence would be with him as it was with Moses. Those that we have reason to think have favour from God, should have honour and respect from us. 3. They make it death for any to disobey Joshua's orders, or rebel against his commandment. There was a special reason for making of this law, now they were entering upon the wars of canaan. Some think that in this they had reference to that law concerning the Prophet whom God would raise up like unto Moses, which they think, though it refers chiefly to Christ, yet takes in Joshua, as a type of him, that whosoever would not hearken to him, should be cut off from his people, Deut. 18. 19, I will require it of him. 4. They animate Joshua to go on with cheerfulness in the work to which God had called him; and, in desiring that he would be strong and of a good courage, they in effect promise that they would do all they could, by exact, bold, and cheerful observance of all his orders, to encourage him. It very much encourages those who lead in a good work, to see those that follow, follow with a good will. Joshua, though of approved valour, did not take it as an affront, but as a great kindness, for the people to bid him be strong and of good courage. May we be enabled to submit to the authority and enlist under the banner of the Captain of our salvation, to be obedient to his commands, and to fight the good fight of faith, in concurrence with all that trust in and love his name, and in opposition to all who oppose his authority. For whoever refuses to obey him inevitably must be destroyed.

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1—7. *Rahab receives and hides the two israelites sent to spy out the land.*

We have no reason to charge Joshua with timidity and distrust in this trans-

action. Probably it was done by Divine intimation, the two men sent were evidently guided and protected in a remarkable manner. Many important and good consequences resulted from their enterprise. Faith in God's promise ought not to supersede, but should encourage our diligence in the use of proper means. Joshua is sure he has God with him, yet sends men before him. We do not trust God, but tempt him, if our expectations slacken our endeavours. See how ready these men were to go upon this hazardous enterprise; though they put their lives in their hands, yet they ventured, in obedience to Joshua their general, in zeal for the service of the camp, and in dependence upon the power of that God, who, being the Keeper of Israel, protects every particular israelite in the way of his duty.

The providence of God directed the spies to the house of Rahab. They came to Jericho, which was about seven or eight miles from the river, and there were directed to the house of Rahab, here called a harlot; a woman that had formerly been of ill fame, the reproach of which stuck to her name, though she had repented and reformed. Simon the leper, Matt. 26. 6, though cleansed from his leprosy, bore the reproach of it in his name as long as he lived; so Rahab the harlot, and she is so called in the New Testament, where both her faith and her good works are praised. These things teach us, 1. That the greatness of sin is no bar to pardoning mercy, if it be truly repented of in time, Matt. 21. 31. 2. That there are many, who, before their conversion, were very wicked and vile, and yet afterward came to great eminence in faith and holiness. 3. Even those who through grace have repented of the sins of their youth, must expect to bear the reproach of them, and when they hear of their faults must renew their repentance; and, as an evidence of that, hear of them patiently.

But the Lord hath "a remnant according to the election of grace," in many unlikely situations, for he will glorify his mercy and grace, in saving some sinners of every kind, whose future conduct may both demonstrate the reality, and illustrate the nature of the grace they have received, that many may glorify God on their account, be edified by their example, and encouraged by witnessing their good conversation in Christ.

God knew where there was one who would be true to them, though they did not, and he directed them thither. That which seems to us most contingent and accidental, is often overruled by the Divine Providence to serve its great ends. And those who faithfully acknowledge God in their ways, he will guide with his eye: see Jer. 36. 19, 26. See the piety of Rahab in receiving and protecting these israelites. Those who keep public-houses, entertain all comers, and are obliged to be civil to their guests. But Rahab showed her guests more than common civility, and went upon an uncommon principle in what she did. It was *by faith* that she received those with peace, against whom her king and country had denounced war, Heb. 11. 31. She bid them welcome to her house; they lodged there, though it appears by what she said, ver. 9, she knew both whence they came, and what their business was. Perceiving that they were observed coming into the city, and that umbrage was taken at it, she hid them upon the roof of the house, which was flat, and covered them with flax. Now we are sure this was a good work; it is so spoken of by the apostle, James 2. 25, where she is said to be justified by works, and this is instanced in that she received the messengers, and sent them out another way; and she did it *by faith*, such a faith as set her above the fear of man, even of the wrath of the king. Had she said, I believe God is yours, and Canaan yours, but I dare not show you any kindness, her faith had been dead and inactive, and would not have justified her. But it appeared both alive and lively, she exposed herself to the utmost peril, even of life, in obedience to her faith. Those only are true believers, who can find in their hearts to venture for God; and those who by faith take the Lord for their God, take his people for their people, and cast in their lot among them. Those who have God for their refuge and hiding-place, must testify their gratitude by readiness to shelter his people on occasion: Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Isa. 16. 3, 4. And we must be glad of opportunities of testifying the sincerity and zeal of our love to God, by hazardous services to his church and kingdom among men.

It is evident from the whole narrative that the spies were led thither by the

especial providence of God, and that Rahab entertained them out of regard to Israel and Israel's God, and not for lucre or for any evil purpose. Every one who is truly converted renounces the alliance of the Lord's enemies, however nearly connected, and must refuse to join with them in their rebellion against God, and their persecution of his servants. And this case was altogether extraordinary, therefore it cannot be drawn into a precedent; and that may be justified here, which would be by no means lawful in a common case.

But, however the guilt of Rahab's falsehood may be extenuated, it seems best to admit nothing which tends to explain it away. We are sure that God discriminated between what was good in her conduct, and what was bad, rewarding the former, and pardoning the latter. Her views of the Divine law must have been exceedingly dim and contracted; a similar falsehood, told by those who enjoy the light of revelation, however laudable the motive, would of course deserve much heavier censure.—(7.)

1. Several learned jewish writers say it was the house of a woman, an innkeeper or victualler; they interpret the word used as a seller of food. This furnishes a reason why the two israelites turned in thither, where they might expect to have food and lodging. Generally speaking, in those times and countries, persons that kept houses of public entertainment were such characters as Rahab is reputed to have been.—*Gill*. The word used in the New Testament, is considered by many to denote a person who sold victuals. The chaldee targum translates it, A woman, a tavern keeper.

6. By these stalks of flax, which Rahab herself had laid in order upon the roof to dry in the sun, in order to the beating of it, and making it ready for the wheel, it appears she had one of the good characters of the virtuous woman, however in others of them she might be deficient, that she sought wool and flax, and wrought willingly with her hands, Prov. 31. 13. From which instance of honest industry, one would hope, that, whatever she had been formerly, she was not now a harlot.—*Henry*. The roofs of eastern houses being flat, were very suitable for such a purpose.

Ver. 8—21. *The covenant between Rahab and the spies.*

Rahab tells the spies what impressions the tidings of God's wonderful works for the israelites had made upon the canaanites—Your terror is fallen upon us; our hearts did melt. Let not the stout man glory in his courage, any more than the strong man in his strength, for God can weaken both mind and body. Let not God's Israel be afraid of their most powerful enemies, for their God can, when

he pleases, make their most powerful enemies afraid of them. Let none think to harden their hearts against God and prosper, for he that made man's soul, can at any time make the sword of his terrors approach it.

We have here Rahab's faith, and its fruits. She had heard of the miracles that God had wrought for Israel, and the promises he had made to them. While the same report enraged or terrified the other inhabitants of the land, she was led to believe that Jehovah was the only true God in heaven and in earth, and that the israelites were his only accepted worshippers. She believed that his promises would certainly be fulfilled, and his threatenings take effect—that there was no way of escape but by reconciliation to him, and uniting interests with his people. The conduct of Rahab proved that she had the genuine principle of Divine faith. By that faith she renounced all her connexion with the devoted canaanites, and ventured her life in expressing love for the people of God, without asking any other recompence than preservation for herself and her near relations; and she deemed the solemn oath by Jehovah, a sufficient security for the performance of their engagements. When we really discover the danger to which our own souls are exposed, and are earnest in seeking salvation, we shall feel for those who are not sensible of their own misery, and thus be led to attempt doing good to our friends and relations. The whole of her conduct manifested a reverential fear of the Lord, an entire belief of his word, a desire and hope of his favour, an affection for his people, and a disposition to forsake, venture, or suffer any thing for his sake. This Rahab was afterwards advanced to be a princess in Israel, the wife of Salmon, and one of the ancestors of Christ, Matt. 1. 5. Those who faithfully serve Christ and suffer for him, he will not only protect, but prefer, and will do for them more than they are able to ask or think.

The spies solemnly engaged for her preservation in the common destruction. Observe here the promises they made her, We will deal kindly and truly with thee. The goodness of God is often expressed by his kindness and truth, Psal. 117. 2; in both these we must be followers of him. Notice also the provisos and limitations of their promises. Though

they were in haste, and it may be in some confusion, yet we find them very cautious in settling the terms of this agreement. Covenants must be made with care, lest we find ourselves perplexed and entangled when it is too late to make inquiry. Those who will be conscientious in keeping promises, will be cautious in making them, and perhaps may insert conditions which others may think frivolous. Their promise is here accompanied with necessary provisos. They will protect Rahab, and all her relations, provided, 1. That she tie the scarlet cord with which she was now about to let them down, in the window of her house. This was to be a mark of which the spies would give notice, that no soldier might offer any violence to the house thus distinguished. This was like the blood sprinkled upon the door-post which secured the first-born from the destroying angel, and being of the same colour, some allude to this, as reminding them of the safety of believers under the protection of the blood of Christ sprinkled on the conscience. Both recall to our remembrance the sinner's security under the protection of the atoning blood; having fled thereto for refuge from the wrath and curse of an offended God. The same cord that she made use of for the preservation of these israelites, was to be made use of for her preservation. What we serve and honour God with, we may expect he will bless and make comfortable to us. 2. That she should have all those whose safety she had desired in the house with her, and keep them there; and that, at the time of taking the town, none of them should dare to stir out of doors. This was a *necessary* proviso, for Rahab's kindred could not be distinguished any other way than by being in her house. It was a *reasonable* proviso, that if they would not perish with those who believed not, they should believe the certainty and severity of the ruin coming upon their city, so as to retire into a place made safe by promise, as Noah into the ark, and Lot into Zoar, and should save themselves from that untoward generation, by separating from them. It was likewise a *significant* proviso, intimating that those who are added to the church that they may be saved, must keep close to the society of the faithful, and having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust, must take heed of being again entangled therein. 3. That she should keep

counsel. If thou utter this our business, that is, If thou betray us when we are gone, or if thou make this agreement public, so as that others tie scarlet lines in their windows, and so confound us, then we will be quit of thine oath.

Rahab then took effectual care to secure her new friends, and sent them out another way, James 2. 25. Those who are in the way of God and their duty, may expect that Providence will protect them, but that will not excuse them from taking all prudent methods for their own safety. God will keep us, but then we must not wilfully expose ourselves. Providence must be trusted, but not tempted.

9. How could Rahab and the spies understand each other? The hebrew language and the canaan or phœnician have a great resemblance, and are thought to be dialects of the same tongue, as the learned prove by many words common to both. Or some of the hebrews had acquired the language of the country.—*Poole*.

Ver. 22—24. *The return of the spies, and the account they give.*

We have here the safe return of the two men Joshua had sent, and the great encouragement they brought to Israel to proceed in their descent upon Canaan. Had they been minded to discourage the people, as the evil spies did that Moses sent, they might have told them of the height and strength of the walls of Jericho, and the extraordinary vigilance of the king of Jericho, and how narrowly they escaped out of his hands; but they were of another spirit; depending themselves upon the Divine promise, they animated Joshua likewise. Their return in safety was itself an encouragement to Joshua, and a token for good. That God provided for them so good a friend as Rahab, in an enemy's country, and that, notwithstanding the rage of the king of Jericho, and the eagerness of the pursuers, they came back in peace, was such an instance of God's great care concerning them, for Israel's sake, as might assure the people of the Divine conduct and care they were under. The report they brought was much more encouraging. All the inhabitants of the country, though resolved to stand it out, yet faint because of us, they have neither wisdom to yield, nor courage to fight—whence they conclude, The Lord has delivered into our hands all the land; it is all our own; we have nothing to do, in effect, but to take possession. Sinners' frights are sometimes sure presages of

their fall. Those terrors of conscience, and that sense of Divine wrath, which dismay the ungodly, but bring them not to repentance, are fearful presages of approaching destruction. But grace yet abounds to the chief of sinners. Let them, without delay, flee to Christ, and all shall be well. If we resist our spiritual enemies, they will flee before us, which will encourage us to hope that in due time we shall be more than conquerors.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1—6. *The israelites come to Jordan—The instructions given to the people.*

Rahab, in mentioning to the spies the drying up of the Red sea, the report of which terrified the canaanites more than any thing else, intimated that they, on that side the water, expected that Jordan, the great defence of their country, would in like manner give way to them: whether the israelites had any expectation that it would so divide does not appear. God often did things for them which they looked not for, Isa. 64. 3. They came to Jordan, and lodged there. They went forward in faith, having been told, ch. 1. 11, that they should pass it. We must go on in the way of our duty, though we foresee difficulties, trusting God to help us through them when we come to them. Let us proceed as far as we can, and depend on Divine sufficiency for that which we find ourselves not sufficient for. In this march Joshua led them, and particular notice is taken of his early rising; as afterwards upon other occasions, ch. 6. 12; 7. 16; 8. 10, which intimates how little he loved his ease, how much he loved his business, and what care and pains he was willing to take in it. Those who would bring great things to pass, must rise early. Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty. Joshua herein set a good example to the officers under him, and taught them to rise early: all in public stations especially should attend continually to the duty of their place.

The people were directed to follow the ark. They might depend upon the ark to lead them; that is, upon God himself, of whose presence the ark was an instituted sign and token. It is called here the ark of the covenant of the Lord their God. If God be ours, we need not fear any evil. He was nigh to them, present with them, went before them. What could come amiss to those who were thus guided,

thus guarded? Formerly, the ark was carried in the midst of the camp; now it went before them, as it were, to put them in possession of the promised land. In the ark were the tables of the law, and over it the mercy-seat: the Divine law and grace reigning in the heart are the surest pledges of God's presence and favour. Those who would be led to the heavenly Canaan, must take the law of God for their guide, and must have the great Propitiation in their eye, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

The people must follow the ark. Remove from your place, and go after it. As those who are resolved never to forsake it—wherever God's ordinances are, there we must be; if they flit, we must remove and go after them. Also, as those who are entirely satisfied in its guidance, that it will lead in the best way to the best end; and therefore, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. This must be all their care, to attend the motions of the ark, and follow it with an implicit faith. Thus must we walk after the rule of the word, and the direction of the Spirit, in every thing; so shall peace be upon us, as it now was upon the Israel of God. They must follow the priests as far as they carried the ark, but no further; we must follow our ministers only as they follow Christ.

In following the ark, they must keep at a due distance. They must thus express their awful and reverent regard to that token of God's presence. This charge not to come near, was agreeable to that dispensation of darkness, bondage, and terror; but we now through Christ have access with boldness. Thus it was made to appear, that the ark was able to protect itself, and needed not to be guarded by the men of war, but was itself a guard to them. Thus also it was better seen by those who were to be led by it. And the whole congregation would have a fairer opportunity of viewing the ark, the division of Jordan, and the way by which they were to go; and as they witnessed the obedience of the waters, the inanimate creation, to their covenant God, they might be instructed to obey likewise. With good reason this provision was made for their encouragement, For ye have not passed this way heretofore. All their way through the wilderness was an untrodden path, but especially this through Jordan. While we are here, we must expect and prepare

for unusual events, to pass ways that we have not passed before; and much more when we go hence. But in the path of duty we may proceed with boldness and alacrity. Whether we are called to endure poverty, pain, labour, persecution, reproach, or death, we are following the Author and Finisher of our faith; nor can we set our foot in any perilous or arduous spot, through our whole journey, but faith will there descry the print of the Redeemer's foot, who trod that very path to glory above, and bids us follow him, that where he is we may be also.

They were commanded to sanctify themselves, that they might be prepared to attend the ark; and for this there was good reason, for, To-morrow the Lord will do wonders among you, ver. 5. God doeth wonders: he is therefore to be adored, admired, and trusted in. Would we experience the more signal effects of God's love and power, we must study to put away from us the pollutions of sin, and be peculiarly careful not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God. We must diligently obey his commandments, follow his directions, expect help from him, and give him all the glory.

1. The river Jordan rises in the country near Lebanon. About sixty miles from its source it passes through the lake of Gennesaret. From thence it proceeds a rapid stream till it loses itself in the Dead sea, its course being in the whole about one hundred miles. The usual width of the stream where the israelites crossed is about twenty yards over, and deeper than a man's height: the current, also, is too strong for any one to swim against it. But there are two banks; the outermost is about a furlong from the usual course of the stream, and at the time of its overflowing, which is in March and April, when the snow on the mountains is melted, the whole channel is filled with a turbid, rapid stream. At this time the israelites arrived on its banks, when their passage could only be effected by miracles; and one was wrought in their behalf. Thus their departure from the wilderness was as miraculous as their entrance into it, and their existence while therein.

Ver. 7—13. *The Lord encourages Joshua—Joshua encourages the people.*

God honoured Joshua, and, by the wondrous work he was about to do, designed to make Israel know that he was their governor. And Joshua honoured God, and endeavoured by it to make Israel know that he is their God. Thus those who honour God he will honour, and those whom he has advanced should do what they can in their places to exalt him.

Joshua speaks to the people, and de-

mands attention, ver. 9: Come hither to me, and before you see the works, hear the words of the Lord your God, that you may compare them together, that they may illustrate each other. He had commanded them to sanctify themselves, and therefore calls them to hear the word of God, for that is the ordinary means of sanctification, John 17. 17. He now tells them by what way they should pass over Jordan; by the stopping of its stream, ver. 13. The waters of Jordan shall be cut off. God could, by a sudden and miraculous frost, have congealed the surface, so that they might all have gone over upon the ice; but frost sometimes occurring even in that country, by the ordinary power of nature, Job 38. 30, it would not have been such an honour to Israel's God, nor such a terror to Israel's enemies. This must be done in such a way as had no precedent but the dividing of the Red sea; and that miracle is here repeated, to show that God has the same power to finish the salvation of his people, as he had to begin it, for he is the Alpha and the Omega; and that the Word of the Lord, (as the chaldees read it, ver. 7,) the essential, eternal WORD, was as truly with Joshua as he was with Moses.

How observant are all the creatures to the God that made them! How glorious a God do we serve, whom all the powers of the heavens and the elements are willingly subject to, and gladly take the nature which he pleases to give them.—(34.)

The people are here told that the ark should pass before them into Jordan. The ark of the covenant must guide Israel. It is called the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth. When we are praising and worshipping God as Israel's God, and our God through Christ, we must remember that he is the Lord of the whole earth, and reverence him and trust in him accordingly. They are told that the ark should pass before them into Jordan; God would not appoint the israelites to go any where, but where he himself would go before them, and go with them; and they might safely venture, even into Jordan itself, if the ark of the covenant led the way. While we make God's precepts our rule, his promises our stay, and his providence our guide, we need not dread the greatest difficulties we may meet with in the way of duty. That promise is sure to all the seed, Isa. 43. 2.

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.

From what God was now about to do for them, Joshua infers an assurance of what he would yet further do. So that the dividing of Jordan was intended to be to them, 1. A sure token of God's presence with them; by this they could not but know that God was among them, unless their unbelief was as obstinate against the most convincing evidence, as that of their fathers, who, presently after God had divided the Red sea before them, asked, Is the Lord among us, or not? Exod. 17. 7. 2. A sure pledge of the conquest of Canaan; if the living God is among you, expelling he will expel (so the hebrew phrase is) from before you the canaanites. He will do it certainly, and do it effectually. What should hinder him? What can stand in his way? God's glorious appearances for his church and people, ought to be improved by us for the encouragement of our faith and hope for the future. God's work is perfect. If Jordan's flood cannot keep out Israel, Canaan's force cannot turn them out again.

Ver. 14—17. *The waters of Jordan are divided, and the israelites pass through on dry land.*

Here we have a short and plain account of the dividing of the river Jordan, and the passage of the children of Israel through it. This river was now broader and deeper than usual at other times of the year, ver. 15. The melting of the snow on the mountains of Lebanon, near which this river had its rise, was the occasion, that, at the time of harvest, barley-harvest, which was the spring of the year, Jordan overflowed all its banks. This great flood, just at that time, which God in his providence might have restrained for once, or he might have ordered them to cross the river at another time of the year, very much magnified the power of God and his kindness to Israel. Though the opposition given to the salvation of God's people have all imaginable advantages, yet God can and will conquer it. Let the banks of Jordan be filled to the brink, filled till they run over, it is as easy to Omnipotence to divide them, and dry them up, as if they were ever so narrow, ever so shallow: it is all one with the Lord.

As soon as the feet of the priests were dipped in the brim of the water, the stream

stopped immediately. So that the waters above stood on a heap, and ran back, and stood like mountains, without inundating the adjacent country. This rising of the river was observed with amazement by those who lived upward upon it for many miles, and the remembrance of it remained among them long after. The waters on the other side this invisible dam ran down, and left the bottom of the river dry. When the people passed through the Red sea, the waters were a wall on either hand, here only on the right hand. The God of nature can, when he pleases, change the course of nature, and alter its properties; he can turn fluids into solids, waters into standing rocks, as, on the contrary, rocks into standing waters, to serve his own purpose: see Psa. 114. 5, 8. What cannot God do? What will he not do for perfecting his people's salvation? It is easy to imagine that when the course of this strong and rapid stream was arrested on a sudden the waters roared and were troubled, Psa. 46. 3. With reference to this, the prophet asks, Was the Lord displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? Hab. 3. 8. No, Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, ver. 13. In allusion to this, it is foretold among the great things God will do for the gospel church in the latter days, that the great river Euphrates shall be dried up, that the way of the kings of the east may be prepared, Rev. 16. 12. When the time is come for Israel's entrance into the land of promise, all difficulties shall be conquered. Mountains shall become plains, Zech. 4. 7, and rivers become dry, for the ransomed of the Lord to pass over.

The priests stood still in the midst of Jordan while the people passed over. There the ark was appointed to be, to show that the same power which parted the waters, kept them parted as long as there was occasion; and had not the Divine presence, of which the ark was a token, been their security, the water had returned upon them and buried them. There the priests were appointed to stand still, 1. To try their faith, whether they could venture to take their post, when God assigned it to them, with mountains of water over their heads. As they made a bold step when they set the first foot into Jordan, so now they made a bold stand when they tarried longest in Jordan; but they knew they carried their own protection with

them. Ministers, in times of peril, should be examples of courage and confidence in the Divine goodness. 2. It was to encourage the faith of the people, that they might go triumphantly into Canaan, and fear no evil, not in this valley of the shadow of death, for so the divided river was, being assured of God's presence which interposed between them and the greatest danger, between them and the proud waters, which otherwise had gone over their souls. Thus, in the greatest dangers, the saints are comforted with his rod and his staff, Psa. 23. 4.

This passage over Jordan, after their weary wanderings in the wilderness, as an entrance into Canaan, shadowed out the believer's passage through death to heaven, after he has finished his wanderings in this sinful world. From his first deliverance from the yoke of sin, he hath been in a wilderness, and though fed with the bread of heaven, and drinking of the waters of life and salvation—though guided, guarded, and encouraged by the providence, the word, and the Spirit of God, he hath long been weary with his toilsome march, and hath wished for rest. To others death may well be terrific, for the consequence is tremendous; but to the believer, the river is, as it were, divided, the terror is removed, the passage is safe, and sometimes joyful, and the event glorious. The waters are cut off, the second death beyond the grave hath no power over them. Christ, the true Ark, hath passed before them in the same way to glory; yea, he comes and meets them, and by his animating presence and sure protection maintains their faith and hope till they issue in vision and enjoyment, being safely landed on Canaan's shore. Yea, the feeble christian, as well as he that hath the strongest faith, shall conquer in this conflict, shall pass through this path beset with terrors, until all the company of the redeemed are "clean passed over," and landed safe on Canaan's shore. Jesus, their Brother and Friend, hath gone before, and he crossed the river when its floods were swelled to a tremendous height. By passing through he hath divided the floods before them; and he safely reached the heavenly shore, when he rose from the dead as the first-fruits of his people, and ascended into heaven as their Forerunner. And he began to be magnified in the sight of all Israel, when thus risen and ascended he sent down his

Holy Spirit to give assistance to his apostles, and success to his preached gospel. Let us, then, treasure up our experiences of his faithful and tender care in the whole course of our lives, that they may come in aid to our faith and hope in this last conflict. Let us prepare daily for death, by the habitual exercise of faith and repentance, and a conscientious and diligent attention to the duties of our station; and let us watch and pray against the anxious and distressing fear of it.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1—9. *Twelve stones taken out of Jordan for a memorial.*

After the people had all passed over Jordan, before they marched to the place of their encampment, or refreshed themselves, or took care for their families, they were required to take measures for perpetuating the remembrance of this important event. The priests patiently and courageously kept their station; not only till the people were all passed over, but until twelve men who had been selected, ch. 3. 12, returned into the midst of the river, and had each taken a large stone, probably as great as they could carry. These they brought on shore. Other twelve stones were formed into a monument in the midst of the river, which doubtless was sometimes visible long afterwards. The works of the Lord are so worthy of remembrance, and the heart of man is so prone to forget them, that various methods are needful to refresh our memories, for the glory of God, our advantage, and that of our children.

God gave orders for the preparing of this memorial. Had Joshua done it without Divine direction, it might have looked like a design to perpetuate his own name and honour, nor would it have commanded so sacred a regard from posterity, as when God himself appointed it. God's works of wonder ought to be kept in everlasting remembrance, and means devised for preserving their memorial. A monument is to be erected, and that, when all the people were passed over Jordan, not even the feeble, who were the hindmost of them, being left behind; so that when God had done his work completely, and every israelite had got safe into Canaan, then God spake to Joshua to provide materials for this monument.

The stones of memorial to be set up in

Canaan were drawn from the very place where the feet of the priests stood firm, and the ark rested in the midst of Jordan. Our dearest recollections of salvation, in its principles of grace below, and in its consummation of glory in the final rest, should be derived, and, if we reach that rest, they will be derived, from the priesthood of Jesus Christ, and from the ark of his redemption. Delightful indeed will they be for coming through such a medium!—(2.)

9. "To this day." Similar expressions often occur in the historical parts of scripture. It is probable they were added by transcribers or revisers in later times.

Ver. 10—19. *The people pass through Jordan.*

When all the people were got to the other side, the priests with the ark came up out of Jordan. They did not stir till Joshua ordered them to move; and Joshua did not order them out of Jordan till God directed him to do so. How low a condition soever God may at any time bring his priests or people to, let them patiently wait, till by his providence he shall call them up out of it, as the priests here were called to come up out of Jordan; and let them not be weary of waiting, while they have the tokens of God's presence with them, even the ark of the covenant, in the depth of their adversity.

As soon as the priests and the ark were come up out of Jordan, the waters flowed down according to their nature and usual course, and soon filled the channel again. This makes it yet more evident, that the stop to the river was not from any natural cause; but from the power of God's presence, and for the sake of his Israel; for when Israel's turn was served, and the token of his presence was removed, immediately the water went forward again. Notice is taken of the honour put upon Joshua by this. On that day the Lord magnified Joshua. Those who honour God he will honour; and when he will magnify a man, as he had said he would magnify Joshua, ch. 3. 7, he will do it effectually. Yet it was not for Joshua's sake only that he was thus magnified, but to put him in a capacity of doing so much the more service to Israel, for hereupon they feared him as they feared Moses. See here the best and surest way to command the respect of inferiors, and to gain their reverence and observance, not by blustering and threatening, and

carrying it with a high hand, but by holiness and love, and all possible indications of a constant regard to their welfare, and to God's will and honour. Those are feared in the best manner, and to the best purpose, who make it appear that God is with them, and that they set him before them. Those who are sanctified, are truly magnified, and worthy of double honour.

This great event was on the tenth day of the first month, just forty years since they came out of Egypt, wanting five days. God had said in his wrath that the israelites should wander forty years in the wilderness, but to make up that forty we must take in the first year, which was then past, and had been a year of triumph in their deliverance out of Egypt, and this last, which had been a year of triumph on the other side Jordan, so that all the forty were not years of sorrow. And he brought them into Canaan five days before the forty years were ended, to show how little pleasure God takes in punishing, how swift he is to show mercy, and that for the elect's sake the days of trouble are shortened, Matt. 24. 22. God ordered it so that they should enter Canaan four days before the annual solemnity of the passover, and on the very day when the preparation for it was to begin, Exod. 12. 3. He would have their entrance into Canaan graced and sanctified with that religious feast, and would have them then reminded of their deliverance out of Egypt, that, comparing them together, God might be glorified as the Beginner and Ender of their bliss.

Ver. 20—24. *The twelve stones placed in Gilgal.*

It is taken for granted, that posterity would enquire into the meaning of the twelve stones which were laid down in Gilgal, supposing them to be intended for a memorial; and the parents are here directed what answer to give to this inquiry. It is the duty of parents to acquaint their children betimes with the word and works of God, that they may be trained up in the way they should go. They must let their children know that Jordan was driven back before Israel, who went through it upon dry land, and that this was the very place where they passed over. They would see how deep and strong a stream Jordan was, but the Divine power put a stop to it, even when it overflowed its banks; and this for those, that live so long after. God's mercies to our ancestors were mercies to us; and we

should take all occasions to revive the remembrance of the great things God did for our fathers in the days of old.

They must take that occasion to tell their children of the drying up of the Red sea forty years before. It greatly magnifies later mercies to compare them with former mercies; for, by making the comparison, it appears that God is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Later mercies should bring to remembrance former mercies, and revive our thankfulness for them. They must put them in the way of making a good use of these works of wonder, the knowledge whereof was thus carefully transmitted to them. 1. The power of God was hereby magnified. The deliverances of God's people are instructions to his people, and fair warnings not to contend with Omnipotence. 2. The people of God were engaged and encouraged to persevere in his service. The remembrance of this wonderful work should effectually restrain them from the worship of other gods, and constrain them to abide and abound in the service of their own God. In all the instruction parents give their children, they should have chiefly in view to teach and engage them to fear God for ever. Serious godliness is the best learning.

Are we not under equal obligations with the israelites to celebrate the loving-kindness of our God? He hath done "marvellous things" for his church in general, and for ourselves in particular. Do we not look back with devout and grateful astonishment on the many gracious dispensations of Providence in our favour? Shall we not raise a pillar with an inscription to our God, who has conducted us through innumerable dangers and distresses in so wonderful a way? For hitherto the Lord hath helped us as much as he did his saints of old. Oh the gross stupidity and base ingratitude of men, who perceive not his hand, and will not acknowledge his goodness in their frequent deliverances!—(60.)

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1—9. *The canaanites are afraid—Circumcision renewed.*

How dreadful is their case who see the wrath of God and his deserved vengeance advancing towards them with steady pace, without any possibility of averting or escaping it! Such will be the horrible

situation of the wicked, when summoned to appear before the tribunal of an offended God; nor can words express the anguish of their feelings, or the greatness of their terror. O that they would *now* take warning, and, before it be too late, would flee for refuge to lay hold upon that hope which is set before them in the salvation of the gospel. God impressed these fears upon the canaanites, and dispirited them, as he had promised, *Exod. 23. 27*, I will send my fear before thee. God can make the wicked to fear where no fear is, *Psa. 53. 5*, much more where there is such cause for fear as was here. He that made the soul, can, when he pleases, make his sword to approach, and kill it with his terrors.

This gave opportunity to the israelites to circumcise those among them who were uncircumcised; "At that time," when the country about was in that great consternation. It appears from this passage that there was a general circumcision of all the israelites who had been left uncircumcised in their bondage, previous to the departure out of Egypt, perhaps during the three days' darkness: see note *Exod. 10*. In reference thereto this is called "the second time." It is evident that the israelites who had been born in the wilderness were generally left uncircumcised; but the cause is much controverted. Whatever the reason was, it seems that this great ordinance was omitted in Israel for almost forty years together, which indicates that it was not of absolute necessity, nor was to be of perpetual obligation, but should in the fulness of time be abolished, as it had been so long suspended.

This second circumcision, as it is here called, was typical of the spiritual circumcision with which the Israel of God, when they enter into the gospel rest, are circumcised. This circumcision being performed under the conduct of Joshua, Moses' successor, points to Jesus as the true Circumciser, the Author of another circumcision than that of the flesh, commanded by the law, even the circumcision of the heart, *Rom. 2. 29*, called the circumcision of Christ, *Col. 2. 11*.

A name was given to the place where this was done, to perpetuate the memory of it. It was called Gilgal, from a word which signifies to take away, from what God said to Joshua, *ver. 9*, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt.

God is jealous for the honour of his people, his own honour being so much interested in it; and whatever reproach they may lie under for a time, first or last it will certainly be rolled away, and every tongue that rises up against them he will condemn. Their circumcision rolled away the reproach of Egypt. They were hereby owned to be the free-born children of God, having the seal of the covenant in their flesh, and so the reproach of their bondage in Egypt was removed. They were tainted with the idolatry of Egypt, and that was their reproach; but now it was to be hoped they would be so entirely devoted to God, that the reproach of their affection to Egypt would be rolled away. Their coming safely to Canaan rolled away the reproach of Egypt, for it silenced the spiteful suggestion of the Egyptians, that for mischief they were brought out, the wilderness had shut them in, *Exod. 14. 3.* Their wandering so long in the wilderness confirmed the reproach, but now they had entered Canaan in triumph, that reproach was done away. When God glorifies himself in perfecting the salvation of his people, he not only silences the reproach of their enemies, but rolls it upon themselves.

6. It is not easy to account for the Jews remaining *forty* years marching and countermarching in the wilderness, without either attempting to invade Canaan or to return to Egypt, but by the continued control of miraculous power.—*Graves.*

Ver. 10—12. *The passover kept at Gilgal—The manna ceases.*

A solemn passover was kept, at the time appointed by the law. While wandering in the wilderness, they were denied the benefit and comfort of this ordinance, as a further token of God's displeasure; but now, in answer to the prayer of Moses upon the passing of that sentence, *Psa. 90. 15*, God comforted them again, after the time he had afflicted them, and that joyful ordinance is revived again. They kept this passover in the plains of Jericho, as it were in defiance of the Canaanites who were round about them, and enraged against them, yet could not give them any disturbance. Thus God gave an early instance of the performance of the promise, that when they went up to keep the feasts, their land should be taken under the special protection of the Divine Providence, *Exod. 34. 24.* He now prepared a table before them

in the presence of their enemies, *Psa. 23. 5.*

The Christian soldier must thus begin his spiritual warfare. Nor can he face any of his enemies without the true circumcision of the heart, as the internal seal of the righteousness of faith, and the ratification of the new covenant between a reconciled God and his soul. Then feeding on Christ, the true Paschal Lamb, who was sacrificed for sinners, and keeping the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, he will be prepared for the conflict. Yet he will not prosper so long as he neglects any of the ordinances or commandments of God, or lies under the reproach of being in bondage to any sin, of living in conformity to the world, or of acting in any thing inconsistent with his holy profession.

Provision was made for their camp from the corn of the land, and the manna ceased. Manna was a wonderful mercy to the Israelites when they needed it; but it was the mark of a wilderness state, and though it was angels' food, and not to be complained of as light bread, yet it would be more acceptable to them to eat of the corn of the land. With this they were now furnished, and the supply came very seasonably. After the passover, they were to keep the feast of unleavened bread, which they could not do according to the appointment, when they had nothing but manna to live upon; perhaps this was one reason why it was intermitted in the wilderness. But now they found old corn enough of the Canaanites to supply for that occasion. Little do they who lay up think whose all these things shall be, which they provide. On the morrow after the passover-sabbath they were to wave the sheaf of first-fruits before the Lord, *Lev. 23. 10, 11.* This they were ordered to do, when they were come into the land which God would give them; and they were furnished for this with the fruit of the land that year, *ver. 12*, then growing and beginning to be ripe. As soon as the fruits of this good land came to their hands, they had an opportunity of honouring God with them, and employing them in his service according to his appointment.

Notice is taken of the ceasing of the manna as soon as they had eaten the old corn of the land. This showed that it did not come by chance or common providence, but by the special designation of

Divine wisdom and goodness. For as it came just when they needed, so it continued as long as they had occasion, and no longer. This teaches us not to expect extraordinary supplies, when they may be had in an ordinary way. If God had dealt with Israel according to their deserts, the manna had ceased when they called it light bread; but as long as they needed, God continued it, though they despised it; now that they needed not, God withdrew the manna, though perhaps some desired it. He is a wise Father: he knows the necessities of his children, and accommodates his gifts to their wants, not to their humours. The word and ordinances of God are spiritual manna, with which God nourishes his people in this wilderness; though often forfeited, yet they are continued while we are here; but when we come to the heavenly Canaan, this manna will cease, for we shall no longer need it.

Ver. 13—15. *The Captain of the Lord's host himself appeareth to Joshua.*

God often spoke to Joshua, but we read not till now of any appearance of God's glory to him; now his difficulties increased, his encouragements were increased in proportion. He was favoured with this vision immediately after he had performed the great solemnities of circumcision, and the passover. We may expect discoveries of the Divine grace when we are found in the way of our duty, and are diligent and sincere in our attendance on holy ordinances. The place where Joshua had this vision was by Jericho; there, it should seem, he was all alone, fearless of danger, because sure of the Divine protection. There he was, some think, meditating and praying, and to those who are so employed, God often graciously manifests himself.

Joshua, as is usual with those full of thought and care, was looking downward, his eyes fixed on the ground, when on a sudden, he was surprised with the appearance of some one standing before him at some little distance. He appeared to Joshua as a man, but one to be noticed. This Man was the Son of God, the eternal Word, who, before he assumed the human nature to die for us, frequently appeared in a human shape. Joshua gave him Divine honours, and he received them, which a created angel would not have done, and he is called Jehovah, ch. 6. 2. He here appeared as a

soldier, with his sword drawn in his hand. To Abraham in his tent he appeared as a traveller; to Joshua in the field as a man of war. Christ will be to his people what their faith expects and desires. Christ had his sword drawn, which served to justify the war Joshua was engaging in, to show him that it was of God, and to encourage him to carry it on with vigour. Christ's sword drawn in his hand denotes how ready he is for the defence and salvation of his people, who through him shall do valiantly. His sword turns every way.

Joshua was not intimidated. He demanded whether he were an ally, or an enemy. So heartily has Joshua embarked in the interests of Israel, that none shall stand by him with the face of a man, but he will know whether he be a friend or a foe. It should seem he suspected him for an enemy. Thus apt are we to look upon that as against us, which is most for us. The question plainly implies, that the cause between the israelites and canaanites, between Christ and Beelzebub, will not admit of neutrality. He that is not with us is against us. Observe the answer, Nay, not for your adversaries, you may be sure, but, "as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come;" not only for you as a friend, but over you as Commander in chief. They cannot but be victorious that have such an almighty Captain.

Joshua recognised his Lord and worshipped him; reverently prostrating himself upon the earth, he waited and asked to know his will. This worship was not only received, but he was commanded to show the same token of respect to the heavenly vision as had been required when the Lord appeared to Moses in the bush; and then he received from him the orders respecting the siege of Jericho. All these circumstances establish beyond a doubt, the conclusion that this was no other than the Son of God, Jehovah, the second Person in the sacred Trinity, the Captain of our salvation, assuring Joshua of success in this war, which in all respects typified the good fight of faith.

There is reason to believe, St. Paul refers to the Divine manifestations of himself in the ancient church, when contrasting the pre-existent state of Christ with his appearance while on earth, he attributes to him the form of God; who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, Phil. 2. 6.—(38.)

Observe the relation Joshua owns between himself and Christ; that Christ was his Lord, and himself his servant and under his command; Christ his Captain, and himself a soldier under him, to do as he is bidden, Matt. 8. 9. The foundation of all acceptable obedience, is laid in sincere dedication of ourselves as servants to Jesus Christ as our Lord, Psa. 116. 16. The inquiry Joshua makes pursuant to this relation is, What saith my Lord? which implies an earnest desire to know the will of Christ, and a cheerful readiness and resolution to do it. Joshua owns himself an inferior officer, and stands to receive orders; this temper of mind shows him fit for the post he was in, for those know best how to command, that know how to obey. Every true christian must fight under Christ's banner, and he will conquer by his presence and assistance.

13. It was the second Person in the blessed Trinity, as is proved, 1. By his designation of Captain or Prince of the Lord's host. 2. By his receiving worship from Joshua. 3. By his requiring the same homage as the Lord who appeared to Moses in the bush. 4. From his being expressly called Jehovah in the next chapter. —Holden.

The general sense of the context evidently shows that the sixth chapter of Joshua ought, by those who thus divided the originally unbroken text of the bible, to have been made to begin at the 13th verse of the preceding chapter, and consequently that there ought to have been no pause or interruption between the two chapters, as they are now exhibited. The message communicated was, that Jericho is delivered into the hand of Joshua, and certain directions are given, which the priests and the people are carefully to observe. But Jehovah himself is said to have been the Speaker who communicated it; therefore the Archangel is Jehovah.—Faber. The first verse of ch. 6. evidently is a parenthesis, describing the state of Jericho at that time.

CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1—5. *God instructs Joshua how to besiege Jericho.*

Jericho resolves Israel shall *not* be its master, ver. 1. It shut itself up, being strongly fortified, both by art and nature; and it was shut up by the obstinacy and resolution of the inhabitants. None went out as deserters, or to treat of peace, nor were any admitted in to offer peace. Thus were they infatuated, and their hearts hardened to their own destruction—the miserable case and character of all those that strengthen themselves against the Almighty, Job 15. 25. God resolves Israel shall be its master, and that quickly. The Captain of the Lord's host,

here called Jehovah, knowing Joshua's thoughts and cares, gave him all the assurance he could desire of success, ver. 2, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho. Not, I will do it; but I have done it; it is thine own, as sure as if it were already in thy possession.

The Captain of the Lord's host gives directions how the city should be besieged. No military preparations were to be made; but the ark of God must be carried by the priests round the city once a day for six days together, and seven times on the seventh day, attended by the men of war in silence, the priests blowing with trumpets of rams' horns. This was all they were to do. God assures them, that on the seventh day, they should be masters of the town. Upon a signal given, they must all shout, and immediately the wall should fall down, which would not only expose the inhabitants, but so dispirit them, that they would not be able to make any resistance. By this extraordinary method of besieging the city, the Lord was pleased to put honour upon the ark, as the symbol of his presence, and to manifest that all their victories were from him. The faith and patience of the people were thereby proved and increased. The nature and utility of divinely appointed means were also illustrated, which must not be neglected, though utterly ineffectual in themselves. Thus, by faith, not by force, the walls of Jericho were to fall down.

Ver. 6—16. *The city is compassed.*

We have here an account of the manner in which Israel passed round about Jericho. Wherever the ark went, the people attended it. Seven priests went immediately before the ark, having trumpets in their hands, with which they were continually sounding. The priests were God's ministers, and thus in his name they proclaimed war with the canaanites, and so struck a terror upon them; for by terrors upon their spirits, they were to be conquered and subdued. Thus God's ministers, by the solemn declarations of his wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, must blow the trumpet in Sion, and sound an alarm in the holy mountain, that the sinners in Sion may be afraid. They are God's heralds, to denounce war against all those that go on still in their trespasses, but say, We shall have peace, though we go on. They proclaimed God's gracious

presence with Israel, and so put life and courage into them. Thus God's ministers, by sounding the jubilee trumpet of the everlasting gospel, which proclaims liberty and victory, must encourage the good soldiers of Jesus Christ in their spiritual warfare.

The trumpets were not the silver trumpets, Numb. 10, but trumpets of rams' horns, bored hollow; they were of the least show, that the excellency of the power might be of God. Thus by the foolishness of preaching, fitly compared to the sounding of these rams' horns, the devil's kingdom is thrown down, and the weapons of our warfare, though not carnal, nor seeming to a carnal eye likely to bring any thing to pass, yet are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, 2 Cor. 10. 4, 5. The doctrine of a crucified Saviour, who is God manifested in the flesh, as the only foundation of a sinner's hope of pardon and acceptance, and the only source of sanctifying grace and true holiness, preached by ministers, despised by the world, has been the Lord's ordinary method of accomplishing those purposes which philosophers, moralists, and lawgivers have attempted in vain, namely, teaching numbers to do good who have been accustomed to do evil. The gospel never is preached in vain in any nation, city, or village, by ministers of any name or sect, who simply seek the glory of God and the salvation of souls thereby. The word here is trumpets of Jubel, that is, such trumpets as they used in the year of jubilee; many interpreters understand it, as signifying the complete liberty to which Israel was now brought, and the bringing of the land of Canaan into the hands of its rightful owners.

All the people were commanded to be silent, not to speak a word, nor make any noise. The sound of the sacred trumpets they were now to look upon as the voice of God among them; it does not become us to speak when God is speaking. It intimates their reverent expectation of the event, Exod. 14. 14; God shall fight, and ye shall hold your peace. God could have caused the walls of Jericho to fall, upon the first surrounding of them, but they must go round thirteen times before they fall. As promised deliverances must be expected in God's way, so they must be expected in his time. He that believes, does not make haste, not more haste than God would have him make. We may

have to go yet seven times before any thing hopeful appears, 1 Kings 18. 43.

One of these days must have been a sabbath day, and the jews say it was the last, but that is not certain; however, if He that appointed them to rest on the other sabbath days, appointed them to walk on this, that was sufficient to justify them. The labour was in the work of God, and immediately for his glory. The law of the sabbath forbids our own work, which is servile and secular; but what they did was a religious act. It is certainly no breach of the sabbath rest to do the sabbath work, for the sake of which the rest was instituted; and what is the sabbath work but to attend the ark in all its motions?

They continued to do this during the time appointed, and seven times the seventh day, though they saw not any effect of it. At last they were to shout: they did so, and immediately the walls fell. This was a shout of faith; they believed the walls of Jericho would fall, and by that faith they were thrown down. It was a shout of prayer, an echo to the sound of the trumpets which proclaimed the promise that God would remember them. With one accord, as one man, they cry to Heaven for help, and help comes in. Some allude to this to show, that we must never expect a complete victory over our own corruptions till the very evening of our last day, and then we shall shout in triumph over them. As bishop Hall says, "A good heart groans under the sense of his infirmities, fain would be rid of them, and strives and prays, but when all is done, until the end of the seventh day it cannot be;" then judgment shall be brought forth unto victory. And at the end of time, when our Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, and the sound of a trumpet, Satan's kingdom shall be completely ruined, and not till then, when all opposing rule, principality, and power, shall be effectually and eternally put down.

6. The trumpets were the trumpets of jubilee, those used on joyful occasions. Probably they were made of metal, but called of rams' horns, from their shape.—*T. H. Horne.*

Ver. 17—27. *Jericho is accursed—The walls fall down, and the city is taken—Rahab and her family are saved.*

Jericho was, as it were, the first-fruits of Canaan, and as such was wholly devoted to the Lord. Every living creature was commanded to be slain, except Rahab and those who had taken refuge in her

house; whatever was not consumed with fire, was to be brought into the treasury of the Lord. If any israelite dared to appropriate any part to himself, the curse of Jericho would rest upon him, and upon the camp of Israel, until he also, and all that appertained to him, were utterly destroyed. The whole was to be a solemn and awful sacrifice to the justice of God upon them who had filled up the measure of their iniquities. No life in it might be ransomed upon any terms; they must all be surely put to death. So He appoints, from whom, as creatures, they had received their lives, and to whom, as sinners, they had forfeited them; and who may dispute his sentence? Is God unrighteous who thus taketh vengeance? God forbid we should entertain such a thought! There was more of God seen in the taking of Jericho, than of any other of the cities of Canaan, and therefore that must be more than any other devoted to him. And the severe usage of this city would strike a terror upon all the rest, and melt their hearts yet more before Israel. Only when this severity is ordered, Rahab and her family are excepted; she shall live, and all that are with her. She had distinguished herself from her neighbours by the kindness she showed to Israel, and therefore shall be distinguished from them by the speedy return of that kindness.

Rahab's house stood upon the walls where the first and greatest danger fell; yet when they were levelled with the earth, and the victorious tribes went every man onward, straight before him, and took the city, the house stood uninjured.—(2.)

She perished not with them that believed not, Heb. 11. 31. The public faith was engaged for her safety, by the two spies, who acted therein as public persons; therefore, Joshua took effectual care for her preservation. The same persons she had secured were employed to secure her, ver. 22, 23. They were best able to do it, who knew her and her house, and they were fittest to do it, that it might appear she was thus distinguished for her kindness to them, and had her life given her for a prey. All her kindred were saved with her; like Noah, she believed to the saving of her house: thus faith in Christ brings salvation to the house, Acts 16. 31.

She, and they with her, were plucked as brands from the burning. Nay, at length she obtained an inheritance among the chosen tribes, became a mother in

Israel, and an ancestor of the Saviour. This instance may surely exhibit and magnify the power of faith, and the goodness of God to deliver in the day of trouble, and in the searching inquisition of judgment. Faith alone can strengthen us to do the will of God. Faith alone can arm us to deny the affections most dear to an unrenowned and sinful heart, and to follow the call and claim of Christ through evil report and good report. Much ignorance and imperfection were mingled with the faith of Rahab, yet it availed for her deliverance. With Rahab, or with the men of Jericho, our portion must be assigned, as we possess or disregard the sign of salvation—even faith in Christ, which worketh by love. Let us remember what depends upon our decision, and choose accordingly.—(2.)

Jericho was condemned to a perpetual desolation, and a curse pronounced upon the man who should offer to rebuild it; the people of Israel, by their own consent, obliging themselves and their posterity never to rebuild this city, and this being the Divine appointment. God would hereby show the weight of a Divine curse; where it rests there is no contending with it, nor getting from under it; it brings ruin without remedy or repair. This curse, not being a curse causeless, came upon that man who long after rebuilt Jericho, 1 Kings 16. 34. It is dangerous to attempt building up that which God will have destroyed: see Mal. 1. 4. But we are not to think it made the place the worse when it was built, or brought hurt to them that inhabited it. We find Jericho afterward graced with the presence, not only of Elijah and Elisha, but of our blessed Saviour himself, Luke 18. 35; 19. 1; Matt. 20. 29.

All this magnified Joshua, and raised his reputation. It made him not only acceptable to Israel, but formidable to the canaanites, because it appeared that God was with him of a truth. The Word of the Lord was with him, so the chaldee, even Christ himself, the same that was with Moses. Nothing can more raise a man's reputation, nor make him appear more truly great, than to have the manifest evidences of God's presence with him.

21. For further observation on the passages which refer to the extermination of the canaanites, see the end of this comment on Joshua.

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1—5. *The israelites are smitten at Ai.*

We repeatedly read of promising appearances being blasted by the sins of the people; but here we read of wrath coming upon the whole congregation through the sin of one man. Contrary to the express command of God, and in contempt of an awful curse, Achan ventured to take for himself part of the spoil of Jericho. The love of the world is that root of bitterness, which of all others is most hardly rooted up. The history of Achan is a plain intimation that he, of all the thousands of Israel, was the only delinquent in this matter; yet, though it was a single person that sinned, the children of Israel are said to commit the trespass, because he was not separated from them, nor disowned by them. This should warn us to take heed of sin ourselves, lest by it many be defiled or disquieted, Heb. 12. 15, and to take heed of having fellowship with sinners, and of being in union with them, lest we share in their guilt. It concerns us to watch over one another for preventing sin, because others' sins may redound to our damage.

Sin committed by an individual, who is a member of a political body, after a sort, belongs to the whole body; see Numb. 35. 33. And thus Achan's sin, though not known to the people, made the whole army guilty before God, till he was put to death.—(56.)

We also see that the easy conquest of Jericho had not only encouraged them to hope for great success, through the power of the Lord fighting for them; but it also excited contempt of the enemy, a disposition to spare themselves and each other's labour, and to expect the Lord to do all for them without their using proper means. Thus men abuse the doctrines of Divine grace, and the promises of God, into an excuse for their own sloth and self-indulgence. Nor can Joshua be wholly exculpated; he seems to have formed his measures without asking counsel of the Lord, who left them to follow their own devices in order to bring to light Achan's sin, and to punish it. One way or other, sooner or later, secret sins will be brought to light; and if men inquire not after them, God will, and with his inquiries will awaken theirs. Many a community is under guilt and wrath, and is not aware of it, till the fire breaks out: here it brake out quickly.

Only three thousand men were sent to seize upon Ai, advice being brought that the place was inconsiderable. It did not bode well at all, that God's Israel began to contrive how to spare their pains. It is required that we work out our salvation, though it is God that works in us. It has often proved of bad consequence to make too light of an enemy. The party sent were repulsed with loss; they had about thirty-six men cut off. Whether these men were peculiarly guilty of secret sin, or not, the Lord had righteous and wise reasons for his conduct. And the consideration of man's sinfulness, and of a future state of retribution, will solve the difficulties in all such dispensations of Providence.

This defeat affrighted the whole camp of Israel. How can this event be reconciled to the promise in ch. 3. 10? To every thinking man it appeared an indication of God's displeasure, therefore no marvel it put them into consternation. If God turn to be their enemy, and fight against them, what will become of them? True israelites tremble when God is angry.

It was a dear victory to the canaanites, whereby Israel was awakened and reformed, and reconciled to their God and shield, and the people of Canaan hardened to their own ruin.—(54.)

Ver. 6—9. *Joshua's humiliation and prayer.*

Joshua and the elders justly considered this ill success as a Divine rebuke, and expressed their sorrow and humiliation before the ark of the Lord, in the most self-abasing posture. Joshua's last and main plea in prayer was excellent; and his concern for the honour of God, more than even for the fate of Israel, was the genuine language of the Spirit of adoption. He prayed, or pleaded rather, humbly expostulating with God.

1. He wishes they had all taken up with the lot of the two tribes on the other side Jordan, ver. 7. This savours too much of discontent and distrust of God, and cannot be justified, though the surprise and disappointment to one deeply concerned for the public interest may in part excuse it. Those words, Wherefore hast thou brought us over Jordan to destroy us? are too like what the murmurers often said, Exod. 14. 11, 12; 16. 3; 17. 3; Numb. 14. 2, 3; but He that searches the heart knew they came from another spirit, and was not extreme to

mark what he said amiss. God knows what he does, though we do not; but this we may be sure of—he never did, nor ever will do us any wrong.

2. He speaks as quite at a loss concerning the meaning of this event. What shall we think of the Divine power, Is the Lord's arm shortened? Of the Divine promise, Is his word yea and nay? Of what God has done for us, Shall that be all undone again, and prove in vain? The methods of Providence are often intricate and perplexing, and such as the wisest and best of men know not what to say to; but they shall know hereafter, John 13. 7.

3. He pleads the danger Israel was now in of being ruined; he gives up all for gone. Even good men, when things go against them a little, are too apt to fear the worst, and make harder conclusions than there is reason for. But this comes in as a plea; Lord, let not Israel's name, which has been so dear to thee, and so great in the world, be cut off.

4. He pleads the reproach that would be cast on God; and that if Israel were ruined, his glory would suffer by it. They will cut off *our name*, says he, yet as if he had corrected himself for insisting upon that, It is no great matter what comes of our little name, the cutting off of that will be a small loss, but what wilt thou do for *thy great name*? This he laments as the great aggravation of the calamity; he feared it would reflect on God, his wisdom and power, his goodness and faithfulness; what would the Egyptians say? Nothing is more grievous to a gracious soul than dishonour done to God's name. This also he insists upon as a plea for preventing his fears, and for a return of God's favour; it is the only word in all his address that encourages, and he concludes with it, leaving all to this issue. The name of God is a great name, above every name; and whatever happens, we ought to believe that he will, and pray that he would work for his own name. This should be our concern more than any thing else; on this we must fix our eye as the end of all our desires, and from this we must fetch our encouragement as the foundation of all our hopes. We cannot urge a better plea than this, Lord, what wilt thou do for thy great name? Let God in all be glorified, and then welcome his whole will.

Ver. 10—15. *God instructs Joshua what to do.*

God encourages Joshua against his present despondencies, and apprehensions of the present posture of Israel's affairs. The Lord rebukes his despondency and unbelieving fears, and intimates that he had other work to attend to. No doubt, Joshua did well to humble himself before God, and mourn as he did, under the tokens of his displeasure; but God delights not in the grief of penitents when they afflict their souls, further than as it qualifies them for pardon and peace; the days even of that mourning must be ended, Isa. 52. 2.

God informs Joshua of the true and only cause of this disaster, and shows him wherefore he contended with them; Israel hath sinned. Think not that God's mind is changed, his arm shortened, or his promise about to fail; it is sin, that great mischief-maker, which has stopped the current of Divine favours, and made this breach upon you. The sin is made to appear exceedingly sinful.

God awakens Joshua to inquire further, by telling him this was the only ground for this controversy with them; so that when this accursed thing was put away, all would be well. But that if this accursed thing were not destroyed, they could not expect the return of God's gracious presence. Times of peculiar danger and calamity should be times of peculiar reformation. But we should look at home, into our own hearts, into our own houses, and make diligent search whether there be not some accursed thing there which God sees and abhors; some unmortified lust, some iniquitous gain, some withholding from God or from others to gratify avarice, or support the expense of luxury, and the pride of life. We cannot expect to prosper, until the accursed thing be destroyed out of our hearts, and removed out of our habitations and our families, and forsaken in our lives. We should also treat all expectations of secrecy and impunity as the delusions of Satan, and should beware of hypocrisy.

God directs Joshua in what method to make this inquiry. He must sanctify the people; he must command them to sanctify themselves. They must examine themselves, must prepare to meet their God. Joshua must bring them all under the scrutiny of the lot; the tribe of which the guilty person was, should first be discovered by lot, then the family, then

the household, last of all the person. The conviction came upon Achan thus gradually, that he might have some space to come and surrender himself; for God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. The Lord is said to take the tribe, and family, and household, on which the lot fell, because the disposal of the lot is of the Lord, and is under the direction of infinite wisdom and justice; and to show, that when the sin of sinners finds them out, God is to be acknowledged. It is also intimated with what a certain and unerring judgment the righteous God does and will distinguish between the innocent and the guilty, so that though for a time they seem involved in the same condemnation, as the whole tribe when it was first taken by the lot, yet he will effectually provide for taking the precious from the vile; so that though the righteous be of the same tribe, and family, and household, with the wicked, yet they shall never be treated as the wicked, Gen. 18. 25.

Ver. 16—26. *Achan is detected—His confession—He and all that he had are destroyed in the valley of Achor.*

We have in these verses the discovery of Achan. Joshua rose up early in the morning, so much was it upon his heart, to put away the accursed thing. It shows his vehement desire to see Israel restored to the Divine favour. In the scrutiny observe, that the guilty tribe was that of Judah, the most honourable and illustrious of all; this was an allay to their dignity, and might serve as a check to their pride. Let not the best families think it strange, if there be those found in them, and descending from them, that prove their grief and shame. The guilty person was at length fastened upon. We may imagine what horror and confusion seized him when singled out as the delinquent, and every one was ready to say, Have we found thee, O our enemy? See the folly of those that promise themselves secrecy in sin. The righteous God has many ways of bringing to light the hidden works of darkness, and so bringing to shame and ruin those that continue their fellowship with those unfruitful works: see Psa. 94. 7, &c. See also, how much it is our concern, when God is contending with us, to find out what the cause is, what the particular sin is, that, like Achan, troubles our camp. We

must examine ourselves, that we may find out the accursed thing, and pray earnestly with holy Job, Lord, show me wherefore thou contendest with me. Discover the traitor, and he shall be no longer harboured.

Achan confesses to the things taken. In plundering a house in Jericho he found a goodly babylonish garment; the word signifies a robe, such as princes wore when they appeared in state. Having thus begun, he proceeded to take a bag of money; two hundred shekels, that is, one hundred ounces of silver, and a wedge of gold which weighed fifty shekels, that is, twenty-five ounces. What a poor prize it was for which Achan ran this desperate hazard, and what an unspeakable loser he was by the bargain! see Matt. 16. 26. He confesses the manner of taking them. 1. The sin began in the eye. He saw these fine things, as Eve saw the forbidden fruit, and was charmed with the sight. See what comes of suffering the heart to walk after the eyes, and what need we have to make this covenant with our eyes, that if they wander, they shall be sure to weep for it. 2. It proceeded out of the heart. He owns, I coveted them. Thus lust conceived, and brought forth this sin. They that would be kept from sinful actions, must mortify and check in themselves sinful desires, particularly the desire of worldly wealth, which we more particularly call covetousness. Oh what a world of evil is the love of money the root of! Had Achan looked upon these things with an eye of faith, he would have seen them accursed things, and would have dreaded them, but looking upon them with an eye of sense only, he saw them goodly things, and coveted them. 3. When he had committed the sin, he was very industrious to conceal it. Having taken of the forbidden treasures, he hid them in the earth. As soon as he had got possession of his plunder, it became his burden, and even had he not been miraculously detected, he would not have dared to use his ill-gotten treasure. When other israelites had been enriched, and enjoyed their abundance with credit and a blessing, he would have lost all comfort of his portion through this accursed thing. So differently do objects of temptation appear at a distance, to what they do when obtained, and the infatuation ceases. Thus Achan confesses the whole matter, that God

might be justified in the sentence passed upon him. See the deceitfulness of sin; that which is pleasing in the commission, is bitter in the reflection; at the last it bites like a serpent. Particularly, see what comes of ill-gotten goods, and how they will be deceived that rob God. He hath swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again, Job 20. 15.

God had convicted Achan by the lot, he had convicted himself by his own confession; but that no one might object against the process, Joshua has him further convicted by the searching his tent, in which the goods were found. Particular notice is taken of the haste which the messengers made that were sent to search; they ran to the tent. They that feel themselves under wrath, find themselves concerned not to defer the putting away of sin. Delays are dangerous, and it is no time to trifle.

Joshua passes sentence upon Achan. Why hast thou troubled us? There is the ground of the sentence, Oh, how much hast thou troubled us! He refers to what was said when the warning was given not to meddle with the accursed thing, ch. 6. 18, lest ye make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. Sin is a very *troublesome* thing, not only to a sinner himself, but to all about him. He that is greedy of gain, as Achan, troubles his own house, Prov. 15. 27, and all the communities to which he belongs. Now, says Joshua, God shall trouble thee. See why Achan was so severely dealt with, not only because he had robbed God, but because he had troubled Israel, as Ahab, 1 Kings 18. 18. This is his doom. God shall trouble thee. The righteous God will certainly recompense tribulation to them that trouble his people, 2 Thess. 1. 6. Those that are troublesome, shall be troubled.

Achan perished not alone in his iniquity. The stolen goods were destroyed with him. All his other goods were destroyed likewise; goods gotten unjustly, especially if they be gotten by sacrilege, will not only turn to no account, but will blast and waste the rest of the possessions to which they are added, Hab. 2. 9, 10; Zech. 5. 3, 4. They lose their own, who grasp at more than their own. His sons and daughters were put to death with him. Some, indeed, think that they were brought out only to be spectators of their father's punishment, but most con-

clude that they died with him, and that they must be meant, where it is said, they burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. God had provided that magistrates should not put the children to death for the father's sins; but in this case he expressly ordered, that the criminal and all that he had should be burned. Perhaps Achan's sons and daughters were aiders and abettors in the villany, and had helped to carry off the accursed things. It is very probable that they assisted in the concealment, and that he could not hide the things in the midst of his tent, but they must know and keep his counsel, and so became accessories; (the text does not say they were infants; (54.)) and if they were at all partakers in the crime, it was so heinous, that they justly shared the punishment. God was hereby glorified, and the judgment executed was thus made the more tremendous.

He was stoned, some think, as a sabbath-breaker, supposing that the sacrilege was committed on the sabbath day; and then his dead body was burnt, as an accursed thing, of which there should be no remainder left. What terrible effects doth sin produce! What fatal consequences often ensue, even in this world, to the sinner himself, and to all belonging to him! One sinner destroyeth much good! What, then, will be the wrath to come? Let us take warning, and without delay flee from it to Christ Jesus as the sinner's Friend.

The Lord hereby turned from the fierceness of his anger. Putting away sin by true repentance and reformation, as it is the only way, so it is a sure and most effectual way to recover Divine favour. Take away the cause, and the effect will cease.

Care was taken to preserve the remembrance of his conviction and execution, for warning and instruction to posterity. A heap of stones was raised on the place where Achan was executed, every one, perhaps, of the congregation throwing a stone to the heap, in token of his detestation of the crime. A new name was given to the place; it was called the valley of Achor, or Trouble. The valley of Achor is said to be given for a door of hope, because when we put away the accursed thing, then there begins to be hope in Israel, Hos. 2. 15; Ezra 10. 2.

There are circumstances in the confession of Achan, marking the progress of sin from its first entrance into the heart to its outward commission, which may serve as the history of almost every offence committed against the law of God, the soul of the transgressor, and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. An undue familiarity with things forbidden was the first cause of his downfall. Undue admiration was productive of sinful desire. Unholy desire led into flagrant transgression. As Christ formed in a believer's heart is the principle of life, and the hope of glory, so evil desires formed in the mind of an ungodly man, will, in all probability, be matured into actual wickedness, and become practical, presumptuous sin. He only who has learned to walk by faith, and to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Saviour, will be able to escape the pollutions that are in the world through lust. He only who can hope that by the grace of adoption his body has become the temple of the Holy Ghost, a habitation of God through the Spirit, will be anxious to preserve himself from all defilement. Never undervalue the strength of a sinful temptation. Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. Remember that we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with the principalities and powers of sin. Self-sufficiency is the bane of man. Be persuaded of your own inability. Be persuaded of Satan's power. Look to the all-sufficient Spirit of God for help; and imitate him who said, I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. —Cast yourselves upon the mercy of the Father at the cross of the Son. Give glory to God that he has convinced you of sin, that he has not yet recompensed your rebellion in eternal judgment, that an atoning Saviour is provided whose blood cleanseth from all sin—a sanctifying Spirit who can make you new creatures in Christ Jesus.—(2.)

21. Many ancient writers describe very splendid robes to have been manufactured at Babylon, woven of various colours, embroidered and painted.

25. In the description, both of his sin and of his punishment, by the trouble that was in both, there is a plain allusion to his name Achan, or, as he is called, 1 Chron. 2. 7, Achar, which signifies trouble. He did too much answer his name.—*Henry.*

CHAPTER VIII.

Ver. 1, 2. *God encourageth Joshua.*

When we have faithfully put away sin, that accursed thing, which separates between us and God, then, and not till then, we may expect to hear from God to our comfort; and God's directing us how to go on in our christian work and warfare, is a good evidence of his being reconciled to us. God gives encouragement to Joshua to proceed; Fear not, neither be thou dismayed. This intimates that the sin of Achan, and its consequences, had been great discouragement to Joshua. Treacherous israelites are to be dreaded more than malicious canaanites. But God bids Joshua not to be dismayed; the same power that keeps Israel from being ruined by their enemies, shall keep them from ruining themselves. To animate him, he assures him of success against Ai. The people are allowed to take the spoil to themselves. Here the spoil was not consecrated to God as that of Jericho, therefore there was no danger of the people's committing such a trespass as they had committed there. Achan, who caught at forbidden spoil, lost that, and life, and all; but the rest of the people, who conscientiously refrained from the accursed thing, were quickly recompensed for their obedience with the spoil of Ai. The way to have the comfort of what God allows us is, to forbear what he forbids us. No man shall lose by self-denial. God having received the first-fruits from Jericho, the spoil of all the cities which from henceforward came into their hands they might take for a prey to themselves.

The stratagem of laying an ambush was of God's own appointment. Whenever those who are intrusted with public councils take prudent measures for the public good, it must be acknowledged that God puts it into their hearts; he that teaches the husbandman discretion, teaches the statesman and general. Jericho had been taken by miracle, without the people's danger or fatigue, to teach them to depend on God, and to give him all the glory of their success. But they were in the next instance instructed that diligence, self-denial, and the exertion of all their powers, both of body and mind, were required to attain success.

Ver. 3—22. *The taking of Ai.*

In this history we may observe, 1. Joshua's conduct and prudence. 2. His

care and industry; he rose up early in the morning, that he might lose no time, and to show how intent his mind was upon his business. Those that would maintain their spiritual conflicts must not love their ease. 3. His courage and resolution; he resolves to lead on the israelites in person. 4. His caution and consideration; he went that night into the midst of the valley, to make the necessary dispositions for an attack. It is the pious conjecture of bishop Patrick, that he went into the valley alone, to pray to God for a blessing upon his enterprise, and he did not seek in vain. 5. His constancy and perseverance; when he had stretched out his spear toward the city, he never drew back his hand till the work was done. His hands in fighting, like those of Moses in interceding, were steady to the going down of the sun. Those that have stretched out their hands against their spiritual enemies, must never draw them back. 6. What Joshua did in the stratagem is applicable to our Lord Jesus, of whom he was a type. Joshua conquered by yielding, as if he had himself been conquered; so our Lord Jesus, when he bowed his head and gave up the ghost, seemed as if death had triumphed over him, as if he and all his interests had been routed and ruined; but in his resurrection he rallied again, and gave the powers of darkness a total defeat; he broke the serpent's head, by suffering him to bruise his heel.

Greater infatuation than that of the king of Ai cannot be imagined, that upon so trifling an advantage as the former, and upon so slight an appearance of further success, he should leave the city defenceless to pursue such a numerous army. But the people of Canaan were left to be blinded by pride, obstinacy, and rage against Israel, to their more speedy destruction. The king and people of Bethel appear to have been confederate with those of Ai, and to have been subdued and destroyed at the same time.

12. The principal parts of the history are plain; but there is difficulty in determining whether the thirty thousand men assaulted the city openly, while only the five thousand lay in ambush; or whether the whole force of Israel appeared in arms against Ai, and the thirty thousand formed an ambushment, while the five thousand formed a second ambushment. The matter is not important, and has nothing to do in respect to edification.—*Henry*.

18. Or, thy banner, or there might be a banner on the end of his spear.—*Poole*.

Ver. 23—29. *The destruction of Ai and its king.*

The israelites put all to the sword, not only in the field but in the city; none remained. God, the righteous Judge, had passed this sentence upon them for their wickedness; the israelites were only ministers of his justice, and executioners of his doom. As Israel acted by peculiar commission, none of their conduct can be drawn into a precedent.

Especial reason, no doubt, there was for the peculiar severity to the king of Ai; it is likely he had been notoriously wicked and vile, and a blasphemous of the God of Israel. Some observe, that his dead body was thrown at the gate where he had been wont to sit in judgment, that the greater contempt might thereby be poured upon the dignity he had been proud of, and he might be punished for the unrighteous decrees he had made in the very place where he had made them. Thus the Lord is known by the judgments which he executes.

Ver. 30—35. *The law read on the mountains Ebal and Gerizim.*

This religious solemnity comes in the midst of the history of wars. We must not think to defer covenanting with God till we are settled in the world, nor must any business put us from minding and pursuing the one thing needful. The way to prosper is to begin with God, Matt. 6. 33. It is also an instance of the care of God concerning his faithful servants and worshippers. In the service of God they were safe; as Jacob, when in this very country he was going to Bethel to pay his vows, the terror of God was upon the cities round about, Gen. 35. 5. When we are in the way of duty, God takes us under his special protection.

As soon as Joshua had access to the mountains Ebal and Gerizim, without delay, and without regarding the unsettled state of Israel, or the machinations of their enemies, he proceeded to ratify the covenant of the Lord with his people, as appointed, Deut. 11. and 27. He built the altar, and offered the instituted sacrifices; he wrote the abstract of the law on the plastered stones; he proclaimed the blessings and the curses from the mountains according to the form prescribed, and read over the whole law to the people. In like manner, by the precepts of the law, sin is detected; by its curses the desert and danger of the sinner are discovered; in the sacrifice of Christ the

self-condemned transgressor finds pardon and peace. We must rest our hope upon the atonement of the great Redeemer, according to the gospel of our salvation, and keep the holy law of God continually before our eyes as the rule of evangelical obedience. We must remember the awful curses of the old covenant, to quicken ourselves in fleeing to the refuge appointed us, to keep alive our fears of coming short of it, and to restrain us from sin in the hour of temptation; and we must embrace and plead in prayer the precious promises of the new covenant, for our encouragement in denying ourselves, and bearing the cross. We are to instruct our families, and train up our children in the same important subjects, and to speak of them freely, even to strangers who are among us.

Let us consider the circumstance of this transaction in reference to the israelites. The covenant was now renewed between God and Israel, upon their taking possession of the land of promise, that they might be encouraged in the conquest, and might know upon what terms they held it, and come under fresh obligations to obedience. In token of the covenant, they built an altar, and offered sacrifice to God, in token of their dedication of themselves to God, as living sacrifices to his honour, in and by a Mediator, who is the altar that sanctifies this gift. This altar was erected on mount Ebal, the mount on which the curse was put, Deut. 11. 29; there, where by the law we had reason to expect a curse, by Christ's sacrifice of himself for us, and by his mediation, we have peace with God; he has redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us, Gal. 3. 13. Even there where it was said, by the curse, Ye are not my people; there it is said, through Christ the Altar, Ye are the children of the living God, Hos. 1. 10.

By the sacrifices offered on this altar of rough, unhewn stone, according to the law, Exod. 20. 25, they likewise gave God the glory of the victories they had already obtained, as Exod. 17. 15. The way to prosper in all we put our hand to is, to take God along with us, and in all our ways to acknowledge him by prayer, praise, and dependence.

The law of the ten commandments was written upon stones in the presence of all Israel. This copy was not graven in the stone, as that reserved in the ark, which

was done by the finger of God; it is his prerogative to write the law in the heart; but the stones were smooth and plastered, and it was written upon the plaster, Deut. 27. 4, 8. It was written, that all might see what it was they consented to, and that it might be a testimony to posterity of God's goodness in giving them such good laws, and a testimony against them, if disobedient to them. It is a great mercy to any people to have the law of God in writing, and it is fit that the written law should be exposed to view in a known tongue, that it may be seen and read of all men.

The blessings and the curses, the sanctions of the law, were publicly read. The auditory was very large. The greatest prince was not excused; the elders, officers, and judges are not above the cognizance of the law, but will come under the blessing or the curse, according as they are or are not obedient to it. The poorest stranger was not excluded; here was a general naturalization of them; as well the stranger as he that was born among them, was taken into covenant; this was an encouragement to proselytes, and a happy presage of the kindnesses intended for the poor gentiles in the latter days.

The mountain of Ebal, or Gebal, is on the north of the town of Sichem, or Napolose; the mountain of Gerizim is to the south. They are separated only by a narrow valley. "There is a kind of sublime horror in the lofty, craggy, and barren aspect of these two mountains, which seem to face each other with an air of defiance; especially as they stand contrasted with the rich valley beneath, where the city appears to be embedded on either side in green gardens and extensive olive grounds, rendered more verdant by the lengthened periods of shade which they enjoy from the mountains on each side. Gerizim is not wholly without cultivation."—*Jowett*.

Townsend, agreeing with *Horsley*, places this reading of the law after the close of chapter 11.

CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 1, 2. *The kings combine against Israel.*

Hitherto the canaanites had acted defensively, but here they consult to attack Israel. It was strange they did not do this sooner. It was more strange that they joined together now. As the conquest of Jericho had given such proof of God's power, and that of Ai of Israel's policy, their wisdom had been not to fight with Israel, but to make peace with them, on the best terms they could, Luke 14. 32. But their minds were blinded, and their hearts hardened to their destruction.

Observe what induced them to enter upon this consultation—when they heard thereof; not only of the condition of Jericho and Ai, but of what passed at mount Ebal. The pious devotion of God's people sometimes provokes and exasperates their enemies more than any thing else. How unanimous they were in their resolves. Though they were many kings of different nations, doubtless of different interests, and had often been at variance with each other, yet they determined to unite against Israel. O that Israel would learn this of canaanites, to sacrifice private interests to the public welfare, and to lay aside all animosities among themselves, that they may cordially unite against the common enemies of God's kingdom among men!

1. There are many texts where the word rendered "over against" should be translated "nigh to."—*Wall.*

Ver. 3—13. *The gibeonites apply for peace—Their stratagem.*

The gibeonites desire to make peace with Israel, being alarmed by the tidings they heard of the destruction of Jericho. Other people heard those tidings, and were irritated thereby to make war upon Israel; but the gibeonites heard them, and were induced to make peace with them. Thus the discovery of the glory and the grace of God in the gospel, is to some a savour of life unto life; but to others, a savour of death unto death, 2 Cor. 2. 16. The same sun softens wax and hardens clay.

Observe the method they took to compass it. They knew that all the inhabitants of the land of Canaan were to be cut off, which made them despair of saving their lives from the sword of Israel, unless they could make Joshua believe that they came from some very far country, which the israelites were not commanded to make war upon, nor forbidden to make peace with, but were directed to offer peace to, Deut. 20. 10, 15. They came under the character of ambassadors from a foreign state. They pretended to have undergone the fatigues of a very long journey, and produced what passed for evident and visible proof of it. It was usual for those that undertook long journeys, to take provisions with them; the country not being furnished as ours is with houses of entertainment. (And it is now much the same in the east.)

Joshua questioned them, Who are ye?

and, From whence come ye? He stands upon his guard against secret fraud, as well as against open force; we, in our spiritual warfare, must stand against the wiles of the devil, remembering he is a subtle serpent as well as a roaring lion. In all leagues of relation and friendship we must first try, and then trust, lest we repent at leisure agreements made in haste. They would not tell whence they came; but repeated the same thing, We are come from a very far country, ver. 9.

They profess respect for the God of Israel, the more to ingratiate themselves with Joshua, and we may believe they were sincere in this profession. They state as their inducement, what had been done some time before in the time of Moses, the tidings whereof might ere this have reached distant regions, the plagues of Egypt, and the destruction of Sihon and Og, but they say nothing of the destruction of Jericho and Ai, though that was the true inducement, because they will have it supposed they came from home before those conquests were made. We need not be long seeking for reasons why we should submit to the God of Israel; we may be furnished either with new or old, which we will.

They make a full submission, "We are your servants," and humbly sue for a general agreement, "make a league with us." They will be glad of peace upon any terms. If Joshua will make a league with them, they have all they come for; and they hope their ragged clothes and clouted shoes will be no exception against them. God and Israel reject none for their poverty. This address was well calculated to insinuate itself into the minds of the israelites, who would be gratified with the idea that they were a people of such renown, that their power was dreaded, and their friendship courted by the distant nations. The favour of Joshua and the more pious israelites would be conciliated by their respectful mention of the name and works of the Lord, which it had been foretold should have this effect, Exod. 9. 16.

The falsehood of the gibeonites cannot be justified, nor ought it to be drawn into a precedent. We must not do evil that good may come. Had they owned their country, but renounced its idolatries, resigning the possession of it to Israel, and themselves to the God of Israel, we have reason to think Joshua would have been

directed by the oracle of God to spare their lives, as Rahab and her relations were spared, and they needed not to have made these pretences. When they had once said, We are come from a far country, they found themselves necessitated to say it again, and to say what was utterly false concerning their bread, their bottles, their clothes; one lie is an inlet to another, and that to a third, and so on. The way of that sin is especially down-hill.

Yet their faith and prudence are to be commended. In submitting to Israel they submitted to the God of Israel, which implied a renunciation of the god they had served, a resignation to the laws of the true religion. They had heard enough to convince them of the infinite power of the God of Israel, and from thence might infer his other perfections of wisdom and goodness; and how can we do better for ourselves, than surrender at discretion to infinite wisdom, and cast ourselves upon the mercy of a God of infinite goodness? These gibeonites did not stay till Israel had besieged their cities; then it had been too late to capitulate; but when they were at some distance, they desired conditions of peace. The way to avoid a judgment is to meet it by repentance. Let us imitate these gibeonites, and seek peace with God in the rags of humiliation, godly sorrow, and mortification; so our iniquity shall not be our ruin. Let us be servants to Jesus, our blessed Joshua, and make a league with him and the Israel of God, and we shall live.

4, 5. The wine bottles were skins of animals; such are still used in the east, and when torn or damaged, they are repaired by sewing on pieces, or gathering up the injured part; sometimes a piece of wood is inserted. Clouted, means patched.

Ver. 14—21. *The gibeonites obtain peace, and are soon after detected.*

The israelites having examined the provisions of the gibeonites, hastily concluded that they confirmed the account the supposed ambassadors had given. We make more haste than good speed in any business, when we stay not to take God along with us, and by the word and prayer to consult him. Many times we see cause to reflect with regret, that affairs went wrong, because we asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord; would we acknowledge him in all our ways, we should find them more safe, easy, and successful.

The fraud was soon discovered. A lying tongue is but for a moment. They

that suffer themselves to be deceived by the wiles of Satan, will soon be undeceived to their confusion, and will find that near, even at the door, which they imagined was very far off.

Had the oath been in itself unlawful, it would not have been binding; for no obligation can render it our duty to commit a sin. But it was not in itself unlawful to spare the lives of those canaanites who submitted to the israelites, without assaulting them or having intended to do it, and who renounced idolatry, desiring only that their lives might be spared on any terms. They were faulty in engaging so rashly in this matter, but were not allowed to violate the oath, though it were to their own hurt. It is evident that God approved their conduct in this, and was displeased with Saul when, long after, he infringed it, 2 Sam. 21. 1—3. So that even in this war, which Israel waged against the accursed canaanites, by especial commission, the breaking of solemn oaths and treaties was not allowed.

A citizen of Zion swears to his own hurt, and changes not, Psa. 15. 4. Joshua and the princes, when they found that they had bound themselves to their prejudice, did not apply to Eleazar for a dispensation, much less did they pretend that no faith is to be kept with heretics, with canaanites; no, they were strangers to the modern artifices of the roman church, to elude the most sacred bonds, and even to sanctify perjuries. Though the people were uneasy at it, and their discontent might have ended in a mutiny, yet the princes would not violate their engagement to the gibeonites; we must never be overawed either by majesty or multitude, to do a sinful thing, and go against our consciences. Let this convince us all how religiously we ought to perform our promises, and make good our bargains; and what conscience we ought to make of our words, when once given.

Ver. 22—27. *The gibeonites condemned to bondage.*

Joshua reproves the gibeonites for their fraud, and they excuse it as well as they can. They considered that God's sovereignty is incontestable, his justice inflexible, his power irresistible, and therefore resolved to try his mercy, and found it was not in vain to cast themselves upon it. They do not justify their lie, but beg pardon for it, pleading that they did it to save their lives. And the fear was

not merely of the power of man ; if that were all, one might flee from that to the Divine protection, but of the power of God himself, which they saw engaged against them.

Joshua sentences them to perpetual bondage. He obliges them to hold their lives under continual labours, in hewing wood and drawing water, the meanest and most toilsome employments. Yet this curse is turned into a blessing ; they must be servants, but it shall be for the house of the Lord. Even servile work becomes honourable when it is done for the house of God, and the offices thereof. They were afterwards called *nethinims*, men given to the levites, as they were to the priests, Numb. 3. 9, to minister to them in the service of God. This may also be looked upon as typifying the admission of the gentiles into the gospel church. They submit to this condition. Better live in servitude, especially such servitude, than not live at all. They were not to keep possession of their cities, for we find afterward that three of them fell to the lot of Benjamin, and one to that of Judah ; nor were they themselves to be at their own disposal, but were dispersed into the cities of the priests and levites, and came up with them in their courses to serve at the altar. Thus Israel's bondmen became the Lord's freemen ; for his service in the meanest office is liberty, and his work is its own wages. This they got by their early submission. Let us, in like manner, submit to our Lord Jesus, and refer ourselves to him, saying, We are in thy hand, do unto us as seemeth good and right unto thee, only save our souls ; and we shall not repent it. If he appoints us to bear his cross, to draw in his yoke, and serve at his altar, that shall be neither shame nor grief to us, while the meanest office in God's service will entitle us to a dwelling in the house of the Lord all the days of our life.

When men are really in earnest to escape the wrath of God, they will not long be left to rest in forms and false refuges ; but will be willing to venture, suffer, and stoop to any thing to obtain salvation. Though the Lord Jesus, the true Joshua, sees through every disguise, and abhors all iniquity, he will not reject sinners on account of their crimes, or the evil which pollutes their endeavours for salvation. He will convince them of their guilt, he

will bring them to repentance, and purify them from those evils. He will take them from their false dependencies, and shame them out of their hypocrisy ; he will teach them to trust in his mercy, and make them partakers of it. He will save their souls, and make them his servants ; and though he corrects them for their sins, he will teach them readily to say, Behold, we are in thy hand, do unto us as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do.

If men are considered as acting according to reason when they renounce all their interests, stoop to any concessions, accept of any terms, and become willing to endure any hardships in order to save their lives, how reasonable must it be for us to be influenced by the fear of eternal punishment, and the hope of everlasting life ! How reasonable is it to renounce the world, to mortify our lusts, to deny ourselves, to submit to the cross, to humble and abase ourselves in the very dust before God ; to count all but dung that we may win Christ, and be found in him ! How earnest we should be to have the covenant of peace ratified to our souls, to yield ourselves to the Lord without reserve, craving only that our souls may be saved, and that he would make us his servants, though in the lowest place, and called to endure the greatest hardships ! In coming *thus* to the Saviour, we do not proceed upon a peradventure. We are invited to draw nigh, and are assured that "him that cometh to Him, he will in no wise cast out." Even those things which sound harsh and are humiliating, and form very sharp trials of our sincerity, will in the event prove of real advantage, and the source of strong consolation.

CHAPTER X.

Ver. 1—6. *Five kings war against Gibeon.*

When sinners renounce the service of Satan and the friendship of the world, that they may make peace with God and join Israel, they must not marvel if the world hate them, if their former friends become rancorous foes, and if they meet with unexpected opposition and temptations, with which they have hitherto been unacquainted. By such methods Satan discourages many who are convinced of their danger, and almost persuaded to be christians, but who are afraid of the cross. These things should quicken them to seek the comfortable assurance that the

covenant of peace is ratified with them by a merciful God, by surrendering themselves the more unreservedly to be his servants, and by applying to him for protection, assistance, and deliverance.

While the kings, whose dominions lay in the north of Canaan, were collecting their forces, the report of the alliance with Israel prevailed with the king of Jerusalem and four others to attack the gibeonites separately, that they might prevent others from imitating them, and afterwards be more at liberty to attack the israelites. Adonizedec, the name of this king, signifies, The lord of righteousness. He was a successor, perhaps a descendant of Melchizedek, who retained nothing of his predecessor's piety but the mere name, and this his conduct belied.

5. Amorites are often taken generally for any of the canaanites. It is supposed that the amorites, being numerous and victorious beyond Jordan, poured their forces into the land of Canaan, and so communicated their name to the rest of the nations.—*Poole*.

Ver. 7—14. *Joshua proceeds to succour Gibeon*
—*The sun and moon stand still at his word.*

Joshua resolved to assist the gibeonites, and God encouraged him in that resolve. The meanest and most feeble, who have just begun to trust the Lord, are equally entitled to his defence with those who have long and faithfully been his servants. It is peculiarly our duty to defend and rescue the oppressed and afflicted, who are brought into trouble on our account, or for the sake of the gospel, and who look to us for help.

Joshua would not forsake his new vassals. Their confidence in him is argument enough to draw him into the field. The greatest obligation to a good mind is another's trust; to disappoint this were mercilessly perfidious. How much less shall our true Joshua fail the confidence of our faith! O, my Saviour, if we send the messengers of our prayers to thee, into thy Gilgal, thy mercy binds thee to relief: never any soul miscarried that trusted thee: we may be wanting in our trust, but our trust never can want success.—(34.)

Joshua showed his good-will in the haste he made for the relief of Gibeon. If one of the tribes of Israel had been in danger, he could not have showed more care or zeal for its relief; remembering in this, as in other cases, there must be one law for the stranger that was proselyted, and for him that was born in the

land. Now that the enemy were actually assembled in a body, despatch was as serviceable to his cause, as delay was before; he marched all night, resolving not to give sleep to his eyes, nor slumber to his eye-lids, till he accomplished this enterprise. Let the good soldiers of Jesus Christ learn from hence to endure hardness, in following the Lamb whithersoever he goes, and not think themselves injured, if for their religion they lose now and then a night's sleep; it will be enough to rest when we come to heaven.

Why needed Joshua to put himself and his men so much to the stretch? Had not God promised him, that without fail he would deliver the enemies into his hand? It is true he had; yet God's promises are intended not to slacken and supersede, but to quicken and encourage our endeavours. He that believeth, does not make haste to anticipate Providence, but he makes haste to attend it, with a diligent, not a distrustful word.

God himself appeared in this great and decisive battle, and employed the artillery of heaven against the canaanites, to demonstrate to his people, that they got not this land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them, but God's right hand and his arm, *Psa. 44. 3.* The Lord discomfited them before Israel; Israel did what they could, yet God did all. It must have been a great terror and confusion to the enemy, to perceive that heaven itself fought against them; for who can contest with, flee from, or fight against the Divine powers? Beside the terror struck upon the canaanites, there was a great slaughter made of them by hail-stones, which were so large, and came down with such force, that more were killed by the hail-stones than by the sword of the israelites. Some observe that Beth-horon lay north of Gibeon, Azekah and Makkedah lay south, so that they fled each way; but which way soever they fled, the hail-stones met them.

Notice the great faith of Joshua, and the power of God crowning it with the miraculous arrest of the sun, that the day of Israel's victories might be prolonged, and the enemy be totally defeated. Joshua, doubtless, acted on this occasion by immediate impulse upon his mind from the Spirit of God. First, he spake to the Lord in earnest prayer, and then to the sun and moon as by authority from God, commanding those luminaries

to stay their course. This was done publicly, before all Israel, that they might hear the charge he gave, and observe the obedience the heavenly bodies rendered thereto. It was not necessary that Joshua should speak, or the miracle be recorded, according to the modern terms of astronomy. The sun appeared to the israelites over Gibeon, and the moon over the valley of Ajalon, and there they appeared to be stopped from proceeding on their course for one whole day. Much has been written respecting the way in which this miracle was wrought, and many difficulties and objections have been urged against understanding it literally. But *the fact*, as far as we are concerned about it, is authenticated by the Divine testimony; *the manner* in which it was accomplished lies beyond the proper limits of our inquiries, because beyond our discovery and comprehension. Is any thing too hard for the Lord? forms a sufficient answer to ten thousand difficulties, which objectors, under the assumed title of philosophers, have in every age started against the truth of God as revealed in his written word. The same power which produced the effect, could prevent all the supposed consequences which are objected. As we have no records of profane history so ancient as this event, we need not wonder that pagan authors have not noticed it.

There never was any day like it, before or since, in which God put such an honour upon faith and prayer, and Israel's cause; never did he so wonderfully comply with the request of a man, nor so wonderfully fight for his people. This extraordinary miracle would give Israel the opportunity to complete their victory; it would render Joshua honourable in the eyes of all the people, and make both him and them terrible to the surrounding nations.

If that God who meant to work this miracle, had not raised up Joshua's thoughts to desire it, that had been a blamable presumption which now is a faith worthy of admiration. To desire a miracle without cause is a tempting of God. O powerful God, that can effect this! O power of faith, that can obtain it! What is there that God cannot do? and what is there which God can do, that faith cannot do?—(34.)

And surely this stupendous miracle of the standing still of the sun, was intended for something more than to give Israel

more time to find out and kill their enemies, which, without this, might have been done the next day. God hereby magnified Joshua, ch. 3. 7, as one whom he delighted to honour; being a type of Him who has all power both in heaven and in earth, and whom the winds and the seas obey. And God hereby notified to all the world what he was doing for his people Israel in Canaan. Proclamation was hereby made to all the neighbouring nations, Come, behold the works of the Lord, Psa. 46. 8, and say, What nation is there so great as Israel, who has God so nigh unto them? Also, God would hereby convince and confound those idolaters who worshipped the sun and moon, and gave them Divine honours, by demonstrating that they were subject to the command of the God of Israel, and that, as high as they were, he was above them; and thus he would fortify his people against temptations to this idolatry. This miracle signified that in the latter days, when the light of the world was tending towards a night of darkness, the Sun of righteousness, even our Joshua, should arise, Mal. 4. 2, give check to the approaching night, and be the true Light. To which add, that when Christ conquered our spiritual enemies upon the cross, the miracle wrought on the sun was the reverse of this; it was then darkened as if it were gone down at noon, for Christ needed not the light of the sun to carry on his victories; he then made darkness his pavilion. And, lastly, the arresting of the sun and moon in this day of battle, figured the turning of the sun into darkness, and the moon into blood, in the last great and terrible day of the Lord.

12. Ajalon was in the tribe of Dan, westward of Gibeon, Josh. 19. 42: Judg. 1. 35.—*Poole*.

"In the midst of heaven," does not mean at mid-day, for then the moon could not have been seen, but the place where the sun was above the horizon when Joshua spake. "About a whole day," rather means, "when the day was perfect," the sun did not go down when the number of hours for his being above the horizon was completed.—*Holden*.

13. This is said to be written in the book of Jasher, a collection of state poems, in which the poem made upon this occasion was preserved among the rest; probably, the same with that book of the wars of the Lord, Numb. 21. 14, which afterwards was continued and carried on by one Jasher. Those words, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon, sounding metrical, are supposed to be taken from the narrative of this event, as it was found in the book of Jasher. Not that the Divine testimony of the book of Joshua needed confirmation from

the book of Jasher, a human composition; but to those who had that book in their hands, it would be of use to compare this history with it; which warrants the appeals the learned make to profane history for corroborating the proofs of the truth of sacred history.—*Henry*.

Lowth considers the book of Jasher to have been a poetical book, no longer extant when the books of Joshua and Samuel were written. The word Jasher means "the upright." *Josephus* considers that it was a collection of records, which contained an account of what happened to the Jews from year to year.

14. Let it be remembered that the sacred historian expressly relates the sun and moon standing still, as a *miracle*. It is, therefore, impossible to account for it on philosophical principles. It must be resolved wholly into the power of God.—*T. H. Horne*. Some have objected to this great miracle on account of what they suppose would have been the consequences. *Bishop Watson* has well observed, that "the machine of the universe is in the hand of God; he can stop the motion of any part, or the whole, with less trouble than any of us can stop a watch." *T. H. Horne* adds, How absurd, then, are the reasonings of those men who believe in the existence of an omnipotent God, yet deny the possibility of the exercise of his power in other ways than those which are known to their limited experience!

Other explanations have been given, tending to silence gainsayers, but which it is unnecessary here to enter upon, further than to observe that objectors never yet have shown that the scriptural account can in any manner be impugned, while the believer will always be satisfied by recollecting, that though all things are bound by God's laws, He is not bound. The statement is made in popular language in the same manner as we still speak of sunrise and sunset. As to the silence of heathen historians respecting this miracle, it is sufficient to observe that the earliest authentic histories of other nations do not go so far back as this period by many hundred years. It is supposed to be alluded to in some of their fabulous narratives.

Ver. 15—27. *The kings are taken, their armies totally defeated, and they are put to death.*

The forces that had dispersed must be followed and smitten. By this vigorous pursuit a very great slaughter was made of the enemies of God and Israel, and none remained but such as got into fenced cities. None moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel. This expression intimates their perfect safety and tranquillity. Not one single Israelite, for the original makes it so particular, was brought into any distress, either in the battle, or in the pursuit. No man had any reproach to cast upon them, or an ill word to give them. The Chaldee paraphrase makes it an expression of their unalloyed joy for this victory, reading it, There was no hurt or loss to the children of Israel, for which any man should afflict his soul. When the army was reviewed after the battle, there was none slain, none wounded, none missing; not one

Israelite had occasion to lament either the loss of a friend, or the loss of a limb. So cheap, so easy, so glorious was this victory!

The kings were now called to an account, as rebels against the Israel of God, to whom, by the Divine promise and grant, this land did of right belong, and should have been surrendered upon demand. The cave to which they fled, and trusted in for a refuge, became their prison. It seems they escaped both the hail-stones and the sword. They all fled, and met at the same place, Providence directing them, and agreed to take shelter in the same cave. The end of this project shows how those who think to hide themselves from God, not only deceive, but destroy themselves. Their refuges of lies will but secure them for God's judgment.

Joshua ordered them to be brought forth out of the cave. And he called for the general officers and great men, and commanded them to trample upon these kings; and to set their feet upon their necks; not in sport, but as ministers of the Divine justice, who were not herein to gratify any pride or passion of their own, but to give glory to the God of Israel as higher than the highest. Then they were put to death. The case was extraordinary, and doubtless it was by Divine direction and impulse that Joshua did this. God hereby punished the abominable wickedness of these kings, the measure of whose iniquity was now full. And by this public act of justice done upon these ringleaders of the Canaanites in sin, he would possess his people with the greater dread and detestation of those sins of the nations that God cast out from before them, which they might be tempted to imitate.

Here is a type and figure of Christ's victories over the powers of darkness, and of believers' victories through him. All the enemies of the Redeemer shall be made his footstool, *Psa.* 110. 1; and see *Psa.* 18. 40. The kings of the earth set themselves against him, *Psa.* 2. 2; but sooner or later we shall see all things put under him, *Heb.* 2. 8. In these triumphs we are more than conquerors, and may be confident that the God of peace shall tread Satan under our feet, shall do it shortly, and effectually, *Rom.* 16. 20; *Psa.* 149. 8, 9. In our spiritual conflicts we must not be satisfied with obtaining some important victory. We must push our advantages, and pursue our scattered enemies, searching out the remains of

sin as it rises up in our hearts, and thus pursue the conquest till we have set our feet upon the neck of every lust, and have completed its entire destruction. In so doing, the Lord will afford us light during our whole conflict, until the warfare be accomplished.

15. This verse interrupts the narrative; it is not found in some versions, and it is verbatim the same with the last verse of the chapter. Probably it was misplaced here by the error of some ancient transcribers. It is not in the greek version.

Ver. 28—43. *Seven other kings defeated and slain.*

Here is a particular account of the cities Joshua immediately mastered. There is a general account of the country hereby reduced and brought into Israel's hands, ver. 40—42. The part of the land of Canaan they first gained, lay south of Jerusalem, and afterwards mostly fell to the lot of the tribe of Judah. Joshua made speed in taking these cities. See what a great deal of work may be done in a little time, if we will be busy, and improve our opportunities. And in the christian's warfare he must give no quarter; every domineering sin, whatever it be, must be marked as the object of peculiar enmity. In this we may expect the blessing of the Lord. He will slay the sin that dwelleth in us, yet spare us. Joshua gave no quarter, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, and left none remaining. Nothing could justify this military execution, but that herein they did as the Lord God of Israel commanded, which was sufficient not only to bear them out, and to save them from the imputation of cruelty, but to sanctify what they did, and make it an acceptable piece of service to Divine justice. God hereby manifested his hatred of the idolatries, and other abominations, which the canaanites had been guilty of, and shows us how great the provocation was, which they had given him, by the greatness of the destruction which was brought upon them when the measure of their iniquity was full. He hereby magnified his love to his people Israel, in giving so many men for them, and people for their life, Isa. 43. 4, when the heathen are to be cast out to make room for this vine, Psa. 80. 8. Hereby also was typified the final and eternal destruction of all the impenitent, implacable enemies of the Lord Jesus, who, having slighted the riches of his grace, must forever feel the weight of his wrath, and shall have judgment without mercy. Nations

that forget God shall be turned into hell, without reproach to God's infinite goodness. The Lord fought for Israel. They could not have gotten the victory, if God had not undertaken the battle; we conquer when God fights for us; and if he be for us, who can be against us?

37. The slaying of another king of Hebron is mentioned, ver. 23. Its inhabitants, doubtless, chose one after the first had fallen in battle. This second king Joshua slew when he took the city.

CHAPTER XI.

Ver. 1—9. *Divers kings overcome at the waters of Merom.*

We here enter upon the history of another campaign Joshua made; it was no less illustrious than the former in its success, though in respect of miracles it was inferior. The wonders God wrought for the israelites were to encourage them to act vigorously themselves. Thus the war against Satan's kingdom carried on by preaching the gospel, was at first forwarded by miracles; but being thereby sufficiently proved to be of God, the managers of it are now left to the ordinary assistance of Divine grace, in the use of the sword of the Spirit.

The canaanites took the field against Israel. They were the aggressors. Sinners bring ruin upon their own heads, so that God will be justified when he speaks, and they alone shall bear the blame. Several nations joined in this confederacy; of different constitutions, and divided interests among themselves, yet they here unite against Israel. Thus are the children of this world more unanimous, and therein wiser, than the children of light. The oneness of the church's enemies should shame the church's friends out of their discords and divisions, and engage them to be one. They were a very great army, as the sand on the seashore in multitudes. Many there be that rise up against God's Israel.

God gave encouragement to Joshua. Fresh dangers and difficulties make it necessary to fetch in fresh supports and comforts from the word of God, which we have always nigh unto us, for use in every time of need. Those who have God on their side, need not be disturbed at the number and power of their enemies; more are they that are with us, than they that are against us; they have the hosts of the Lord, that have the Lord of hosts engaged for them. The wisdom and

goodness of God is to be observed in preparing his people to encounter the greater force, by breaking the lesser. God proportions our trials to our strength, and our strength to our trials.

Joshua obtained a complete victory; he smote and chased the canaanites, in the several ways they took in their flight. His obedience in destroying the horses and chariots, shows his subjection to the Divine will, and his self-denial in compliance with God's command. It proves his confidence in the power of God engaged for Israel, which enabled them to despise the chariots and horses which others trusted in, Psa. 20. 7; 33. 17; and shows his care to keep up in the people the like confidence in God, by taking that from them, in which they would be tempted to trust too much. This was cutting off a right hand. The possession of those things on which the carnal heart is prone to depend, is hurtful to the life of faith, and the walk with God; therefore it is better to be without secular advantages than to have the heart endangered by them. True faith will produce obedience, and in proportion to the strength of that faith. They who prosper in the ways of God, take the precepts and directions from his word as well as the promises, with equal simplicity of submission and diligent observance.

1, 2, 5. This was a confederacy of the northern kings. Madon, or Maron, and some others, bordered upon Syria. Chinneroth was situated on the sea of Tiberias, or Gennesaret, which is called the sea of Chinnereth, Numb. 34. 11. The waters of Merom were nearer the source of the Jordan, afterwards called the lake Samochonites, now Bahr el Houle; it is about seven miles long, and from two to four wide. The sea of Tiberias is about eighteen miles long, and from five to six miles in width.

4. The expression in the text shows the great number of inhabitants in the promised land, and its fertility.

6. They were to disable the horses, so that they should be unfit to be employed in war. The israelites had no horses among them, which made the northern canaanites more formidable as enemies. They were forbidden to multiply horses for war, (see Deut. 17. 16,) but might use them for agriculture, and the purposes of common life, for which, however, they seem to have preferred asses.

Ver. 10—14. *Hazor is taken and burned.*

Joshua carried the war to the northern extremity of the land, to the great and ancient city of Zidon; he then turned back to destroy Hazor and its king. The Lord had forbidden the israelites to make any league with the idolatrous inhabit-

ants of the land; but the examples of Rahab and of the gibeonites show that individuals or cities who would renounce their idolatry, and come heartily into the interests of Israel, might be spared. But the canaanites were not disposed to seek for mercy; they never so much as proposed any terms of accommodation. This we are told was of the Lord. They had previously filled up the measure of their iniquity, and were *judicially* left to the blindness, pride, obstinacy, and enmity of their own hearts, and to the power of Satan; all restraints being withdrawn, while the dispensations of Providence tended to drive them to desperation; and they brought upon themselves that vengeance which they had justly merited, and of which the Lord had constituted the israelites to be executioners, by the commandment he gave unto Moses. This last reason is often mentioned to show that Joshua and Israel did not act out of cruelty, revenge, or avarice, but simply in obedience to God.

13. Stood still in their strength, or were situated upon hills; such a situation added much to the strength of a city, and rendered it desirable to be preserved.

Ver. 15—23. *All that country subdued—The anakims cut off.*

The cutting off the sons of Anak is particularly mentioned; these had been a terror to the spies forty years before, and their bulk and strength had been thought an insuperable difficulty to reducing Canaan, Numb. 13. 28, 33. Even the opposition which seemed invincible was got over. Never let the sons of Anak be a terror to the Israel of God, for even their day to fall will come. The canaanites were rooted out, yet not perfectly, as we shall find after, in the book of Judges; but they were not able to make any head, so as to keep the israelites out of possession of the land, or so as to keep them in action, or give them much molestation, ver. 23, The land rested from war. It ended not in a peace *with* the canaanites, that was forbidden, but in a peace *from* them. There is a rest, a rest from war, remaining for the people of God, into which they shall enter, when their warfare is accomplished.

That which was now done, is here compared with what had been said to Moses. God's word and his works, if viewed and considered together, will be found mutually to illustrate each other. It is here

observed that all the precepts God had given to Moses relating to the conquest of Canaan, were obeyed on the people's part, at least, while Joshua lived. And that all the promises God had given to Moses, relating to this conquest, were accomplished on his part. Joshua took the whole land, conquered it, and took possession of it, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses. God had promised to drive out the nations before them, Exod. 33. 2; 34. 11; and to bring them down, Deut. 9. 3. And now it was done. There failed not one word of the promise. Successes and enjoyments are doubly sweet and comfortable to us, when we see them flowing to us from the Divine promises. This is according to what the Lord said; as our obedience is acceptable to God, when it has regard to the precept. And if we make conscience of our duty, we need not question the performance of the promise.

The believer must never put off his armour, or expect lasting peace, till he close his eyes in death; nay, as his strength, experience, consolations, and usefulness are increased, he may expect more heavy trials, and more severe conflicts; but the Lord will not permit any of his enemies to assault him till He hath prepared him for the battle. The strongest faith will be enfeebled if we are left to ourselves, and whenever we view difficulties or dangers with an eye of sense, our hearts are overwhelmed with discouragement. But Jesus ever liveth to intercede for his people, and their faith shall not fail, however Satan may obtain permission to assault them. And however tedious, sharp, and difficult the believer's warfare, his patience in tribulation may be encouraged by the joyfulness of hope; for he will ere long rest from sin and from sorrow in the Canaan above.

Joshua, who had led Israel on to conquest, was now commanded to divide the countries which they had subdued among their tribes, and to put each into possession of its allotted inheritance. The transaction is quoted by St. Paul, Heb. 4. 7—9, with unequivocal reference to the blessedness of life eternal, in which the christian's struggle with the powers of darkness shall terminate. If Jesus (that is, Joshua) had given them final and everlasting rest, then David, who lived five hundred years after the entrance of Israel into Canaan, would not have spoken of another day. "There

remaineth, therefore, a rest for the people of God."—(2.)

19, 20. This passage evidently implies, that it was in the power of these nations, by accepting peace, to escape extermination; but that they were permitted to harden their hearts against all the wonders of Divine Providence in behalf of the jews, and by this obstinacy exposed to suffer the full weight of that punishment which their crimes deserved, and which God had denounced against them. All who are conversant in the language of the Old Testament, know, that it speaks of every event which God permits, as proceeding directly from him, and describes him as hardening the hearts of those who abuse the Divine dispensations to harden their hearts in guilt; though these dispensations display a plain natural tendency to soften and reform them.—*Graves.*

CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1—6. *The two kings conquered by Moses.*

The historian, before he comes to sum up the new conquests Israel had made, recites in these verses their former conquests in the time of Moses, under whom they became masters of the great and potent kingdoms of Sihon and Og. Fresh mercies must not drown the remembrance of former mercies, nor must the glory of the present instruments of good to the church, be suffered to eclipse and diminish the just honour of those who have gone before them, and who were the blessings and ornaments of their day, since God is the same who wrought by both.

Here is a description of this conquered country; from the river Arnon in the south, to mount Hermon in the north. In particular, here is a description of the kingdom of Sihon, ver. 2, 3, and that of Og, ver. 4, 5. Moses had described this country very particularly, Deut. 2. 36; 3. 4, &c., and the description here agrees with his. King Og is said to dwell at Ashtaroth and Edrei, ver. 4, probably, because they were both his royal cities; but Israel took both from him, and made one grave to serve him that could not be content with one palace. Moses assigned this country to the two tribes and a half, at their request, and divided it among them, Numb. 32. 33. The division is here mentioned as an example to Joshua, now he had conquered the country on this side Jordan. Moses gave to one part of Israel a very rich and fruitful country, but it was on the outside of Jordan. Joshua gave to all Israel the holy land, the mountain of God's sanctuary, *within* Jordan. So the law conferred upon some few of God's spiritual Israel external temporal blessings, which

were earnest of good things to come; but our Lord Jesus, the true Joshua, has provided for all the children of promise spiritual blessings, the privileges of the sanctuary, and the heavenly Canaan. The triumphs and grants of the law were glorious, but those of the gospel far exceed in glory. Jesus alone brings the whole multitude of the spiritual Israel to the promised rest and inheritance; and though his true people enjoy many blessings from him in this world, yet they do not enter upon the possession of complete felicity, till they pass over the Jordan of death to the mansions above.

Ver. 7—24. *The kings whom Joshua smote.*

We have here the limits of the country Joshua conquered. It lay between Jordan on the east, and the Mediterranean sea on the west, and extended from Baal-Gad, near Lebanon, in the north, to Halak, which lay upon the country of Edom, in the south. The boundaries are more largely described, Numb. 34. 2, &c.; this shows that God had given them possession of all the land he had promised by Moses, if they would but have kept it.

The various kinds of land that were found in this country contributed both to its pleasantness and to its fruitfulness. There were mountains, not all craggy and rocky and barren, frightful to the traveller, and useless to the inhabitants, but fruitful hills, such as put forth precious things, Deut. 33. 15, which charm the spectator's eye, and fill the owner's hand. And valleys, not mosses or bogs, but covered with corn, Psal. 65. 13. There were plains, and springs to water them; and even in that rich land there were wildernesses, or forests, which were not so thickly inhabited as other parts, yet had towns and houses in them.

The several nations that had been in possession of this country, hittites, amorites, canaanites, &c. all were descended from Canaan, the accursed son of Ham, Gen. 10. 15—18. Seven nations they are called, Deut. 7. 1, and so many are there reckoned up, but here six only are mentioned, the girgashites being here either lost or left out, though we find them, Gen. 10. 16, and 15. 21. Either they were incorporated with some other of these nations, or, as the tradition of the jews is, upon the approach of Israel under Joshua they withdrew to Africa, leaving their country to be possessed by Israel, with whom they saw it was to no

purpose to contend, therefore they are not named among the nations Joshua subdued. A list is given of the kings that were conquered and subdued by the sword of Israel, some in the field, others in their own cities: thirty-one in all. This shows what a very fruitful country Canaan then was, which could support so many kingdoms, and in which so many chose to throng together, rather than disperse themselves into other countries, which we may suppose were not yet inhabited, but where, though they might find more room, they could not expect such plenty. This was the land God appointed for Israel; yet at this day it is one of the most barren, despicable, and unprofitable countries in the world. Such is the effect of the curse it lies under, since its possessors rejected Christ and his gospel, as was foretold by Moses, Deut. 29. 23.

It also shows in what narrow limits these kings' ambition was then confined. They had the government, each of them, only of one city, and the towns and villages that pertained to it. Though they doubtless waged frequent wars with each other, and obtained advantages over each other, (see ch. 11. 10,) yet no one had obtained the sovereignty of the whole. Yet it should seem that although restricted in the extent of their territories, they were absolute in their power, their subjects being all entirely at their command.

The vengeance of a righteous God inflicted upon all these kings and their numerous subjects, for their wickedness, should impress our minds with reverential awe of his majesty and purity, and with dread and hatred of sin. The fruitful land which he bestowed upon his chosen people, and thus prepared for their reception, should inspire our hearts with hope and confidence in his mercy, and with humble gratitude. In both, the final issue of all things is represented, when the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal.

Procopius cites a phenician inscription to the following purport: "We are they who flee from the face of Jesus, the robber, the son of Nave." Suidas states it thus; "We are the canaanites whom Jesus, the robber, expelled." The difference is merely verbal; the greek name for Joshua is Jesus. Ancient monuments prove that the carthaginians were a colony of tyrians who escaped from Joshua, and that the inhabitants

of Leptis, in Africa, came originally from the sidonians, who abandoned their country on account of the calamities by which it was overwhelmed.—*T. H. Horne.*

The girgashites inhabited the country to the north of the lake Gennesareth, and are supposed to have migrated in a body on the approach of the israelites. The hittites occupied the southern part of Palestine; the hivites and perizzites were more in the centre of the land; the jebusites about Jerusalem; the amorites, the mountains on the west of the Dead sea, and the part of the land of Moab ruled by Sihon and Og; the canaanites dwelt more to the north, in the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon, but their name sometimes was applied generally to all the people of the land of Palestine.

Thirty-one kingdoms, or seigniories, were divided among nine tribes and a half of Israel. Of these fell to the lot of Judah the kingdoms of Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, Eglon, Debir, Arad, Libnah, and Adullam, eight in all, besides part of the kingdom of Jerusalem, and part of Geder. Benjamin had the kingdoms of Jericho, Ai, Jerusalem, Makkedah, Beth-el, and the nations of Gilgal, six in all. Simeon had the kingdom of Hormah, and part of Gedar. Ephraim had the kingdoms of Gezer and Tirzah. Manasseh, that half tribe, had the kingdoms of Tappuah and Hephher, Taanach and Megiddo. Asher had the kingdoms of Aphek and Achshaph. Zebulun had the kingdoms of Lasharon, Shimron-meron, and Jokneam. Naphtali had the kingdoms of Madon, Hazor, and Kedesh. And Issachar had that of Dor.—*Henry.*

CHAPTER XIII.

Ver. 1—6. *The bounds of the land not yet conquered.*

At this chapter begins the account of the dividing of the land of Canaan among the tribes of Israel by lot; a narrative illustrating the performance of the promise made to the fathers, that this land should be given to the seed of Jacob, to them, and not to any other. The preserving of this distribution would be of great use to the jewish nation, who were obliged by the law to keep up this first distribution, and not to transfer inheritances from tribe to tribe, Numb. 36. 9. It is likewise of use to us for explaining other scriptures. The geographical description of a country gives much light to the history of it. We are not to pass over these chapters of hard names, as useless and not to be regarded. Where God has a mouth to speak, and a hand to write, we should find an ear to hear, and an eye to read; and may God give us a heart to profit!

Joshua is supposed to have been about one hundred years of age at this time. God notices it to him; God said to him, Thou art old. It is good for those who are old and stricken in years to be put

in remembrance of their being so. Some have grey hairs here and there upon them, and perceive it not, Hos. 7. 9; they do not care to think of it, and therefore need to be told of it, that they may be quickened to do the work of life, and make preparation for death, which is coming toward them apace. But God mentions Joshua's age and growing infirmities, as a reason why he should now lay by the thoughts of pursuing the war; he cannot expect to see an end of it quickly, for there remained much land to be possessed, in several parts remote from each other. As he had entered into the labours of Moses, so let others enter into his, and bring forth the top-stone; the doing of which was reserved for David, long after. God considers the frame of his people, and would not have them burdened with work above their strength. It cannot be expected that old people should do as they have done, for God and their country. It is also a reason why he should speedily apply himself to divide that which he had conquered. That work must be done, and done quickly; it was necessary that he should preside in the doing of it, and, therefore, he being old and stricken in years, let him make that his concluding piece of service to God and Israel. All people, but especially old people, should set themselves to do that quickly which must be done before they die, lest death prevent them, Eccl. 9. 10.

God gave Joshua a particular account of the land that yet remained unconquered; and he made the people acquainted with it, that they might be the more affected with God's goodness to them in giving them this good land, and might thereby be engaged to love and serve him: also, that they might not be tempted to make any league, or contract any dangerous familiarity with these their neighbours, so as to learn their ways. And that they might keep themselves in a posture for war as long as there remained any land to be possessed. Nor must we lay aside our spiritual armour, or be off our watch, till our victory be complete in the kingdom of glory.

God promises that he would make the israelites masters of all those countries that were yet unsubdued, though Joshua was old, and not able to do it; old, and not likely to live to see it done. Whatever becomes of us, and however we may be

laid aside as despised, broken vessels, God will do his own work in his own time; I will drive them out. "I will do it by my Word," so the chaldee says here, as in many other places; by the eternal Word, the Captain of the hosts of the Lord. This promise plainly supposes that the children of Israel must themselves attempt and endeavour their extirpation, must go up against them, else they could not be said to be driven out before them. If Israel, through sloth, or cowardice, or affection to these idolaters, sit still and let them alone, they must blame themselves, and not God, if they be not driven out. We must work out our salvation, then God will work in us, and work with us; we must resist our spiritual enemies, then God will tread them under our feet; we must go forth to our christian work and warfare, then God will go forth before us.

3. Sihor is an ancient name, usually given to the Nile. *Poole* considers it here to mean the stream called "the river of Egypt," on the south of Canaan.

Ver. 7—33. *The inheritance of the two tribes and a half to the east of Jordan.*

Joshua is to assign to each tribe its portion, including what was yet unsubdued, which must be brought into the lot, in believing confidence that it should be conquered when Israel was multiplied, so as to have occasion for it. We must take the comfort of what we have, though we cannot compass all we would have. The land must be divided among the several tribes; they must not always live in common, as now they did. Which way soever a just property is acquired, it is the will of that God who has given the earth to the children of men, that there should be separate properties; and that every man should know his own, and not invade that which is another's. The world must be governed, not by force, but right; by the law of equity, not of arms. Wheresoever our habitation is placed, and in whatever honest way our portion is assigned us, we should consider them as allotted of God; we should acquiesce in, be thankful for, and use them as such, while every prudent method should be devised to prevent litigation about property, both at present and in future.

It must be divided for an inheritance, though gotten by conquest. The promise came to them as an inheritance from their fathers; the land of promise pertained to the children of promise, who

were thus beloved for their fathers' sakes, and in performance of the covenant with them. Joshua must divide it, not by his own will; he must refer the matter wholly to God, and to his determination. He it is that appoints the bounds of our habitation, and every man's judgment must proceed from him. Joshua must direct this affair, that he might be herein a type of Christ, who has not only conquered for us the gates of hell, but has opened to us the gates of heaven, and having purchased the eternal inheritance for all believers, will put them in possession of it.

Here is a general description of the country given to the two tribes and a half, by Moses. Israel must know their own, and keep to it, and may not, under pretence of their being God's peculiar people, encroach upon their neighbours. There is an exception of one part of this country from Israel's possession, though in their grant, namely, the geshurites and the maachathites, ver. 13. They had not leisure to reduce all the remote and obscure corners of the country in the time of Moses, and afterward they had no mind to it, being easy with what they had. Thus those who are not straitened in God's promises, are yet straitened in their own faith, and prayers, and endeavours. There is a very particular account of the inheritances of these two tribes and a half. And we have reason to think that the register here prescribed and published of the lot of each tribe, was of great use to Israel in after-ages, was often appealed to, and always acquiesced in.

Twice in this chapter it is taken notice of, that to the tribe of Levi Moses gave no inheritance: see Numb. 18. 20. They must be provided for in another manner; their habitations must be scattered in all the tribes, and their maintenance brought out of all the tribes. God himself was the portion both of their inheritance and of their cup, Deut. 10. 9; 18. 2. The ministers of the Lord should show themselves indifferent about worldly interests, and the people should take care they want nothing suitable. And happy are they who have the Lord God of Israel for their inheritance, though little of this world falls to their lot. His providences will supply their wants, his ordinances and spiritual consolations will support and feast their souls till they arrive at that fulness of joy, and those pleasures, which are at his right hand for evermore.

It is not possible now to ascertain the situation of all the cities mentioned in this and the following chapters. The changes which the land of Canaan has undergone during the last three thousand years have caused many of them to disappear, while the names of others have been changed. This, however, is no argument against the sacred history: similar circumstances have occurred in our own and other countries. The situation even of Troy and of Babylon, two cities, perhaps, the most famous in ancient history, cannot now be precisely ascertained, and many volumes have been written respecting their sites; while the situation of most of the places of importance mentioned in scripture can still be accurately pointed out; others of less note existed in the days of Jerome and Eusebius, by whom they were described: and several have been recently traced out by the industry of modern travellers.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ver. 1—5. *The nine tribes and a half to have their inheritance by lot.*

The israelites must disperse to replenish the new conquests. Canaan would have been subdued in vain, if it had not been inhabited. Yet every man might not go and settle where he pleased. God had given Moses directions how the distribution should be made, and those directions are here punctually observed: see Numb. 26. 53, &c. The tribes among whom this division was to be made were nine and a half. Joseph made two tribes. Manasseh and Ephraim, pursuant to Jacob's adoption of Joseph's two sons; and so the number of the tribes was kept to twelve, though Levi was taken out, which is intimated here. In dividing by lot they referred themselves to God, and to his wisdom and sovereignty, believing him fitter to determine for them than they for themselves, Psa. 47. 4. He shall choose our inheritance for us. They professed willingness to abide by that determination; for every man must take what is his lot, and make the best of it. In allusion to this, we are said to obtain an inheritance in Christ, Eph. 1. 11; "we have obtained it by lot," so the word signifies; for it is obtained by Divine designation; Christ, our Joshua, gives eternal life to as many as were given him, John 17. 2.

Let us survey our heritage of present mercy—our prospect for the land of promise, eternal in the heavens. Is God any respecter of persons? Is it not better that our earthly condition, our place in the appointments of temporal good or sorrow, should be determined by the infinite wisdom of our heavenly Father, than by our

own ignorance? Is it not better that all should be appointed by Him who knows our wants and capacities with infallible certainty, than if the choice rested with ourselves? We discern less of the plans of eternal Wisdom than the insect, whose eye scarcely takes in the surface of the clod on which he stands, can see of the world around him. How then could we discover what our own best heritage may be, and the mode of securing it, in entire harmony with all the purposes of God? And shall not they for whom the great mystery of godliness was exhibited, they whose redemption was purchased by Jesus Christ, thankfully refer their state to his appointment!—(2.)

Ver. 6—15. *Caleb obtains Hebron by privilege.*

Caleb's request is, "Give me this mountain," or Hebron. First: Because it was formerly in God's promise to him, and he would let Israel know how much he valued the promise; insisting upon this mountain, whereof the Lord spake in that day, as most desirable, though, perhaps, as good a portion might have fallen to him by lot in common with the rest. Those who live by faith value that which is given by promise, far above what is given by providence only. Second: Because it was now in the anakims' possession, and he would let Israel know how little he feared the enemy, and would by his example animate them to push on their conquests. Herein Caleb answered his name, which signifies "all heart."

From this chapter it appears probable that when the other spies terrified themselves and the people, about the anakims who dwelt at Hebron, Numb. 13. 32, 33, Caleb, in the confidence of faith, proposed to take that place for an inheritance, and to wait for it till the anakims were dispossessed. It would seem that by Divine direction Moses had engaged and ordered it should be so, when the Lord declared that Joshua and Caleb alone should live to enter the promised land. In support of this claim, he took occasion to rejoice in the testimony which the Lord had borne to his uprightness, and in the testimony of his conscience that he had given his report "as it was in his heart." He thankfully mentioned the goodness of God to him in keeping him alive thirty-eight years in the wilderness, and seven years in the wars of Canaan.

It seems that the anakims had possessed themselves of Hebron after it was

taken by Joshua, ch. 10. 37, and Caleb now undertook to drive them out. Thus he expressed his readiness to attempt, not confiding in his own strength or valour, or in the assistance of his brethren, but resting the whole upon the Lord being with him. Joshua blessed him, commended his bravery, applauded his request, and gave him what he asked. He also prayed for him, and for his good success against the sons of Anak. Joshua was both a prince and a prophet, and upon both accounts it was proper for him to give Caleb his blessing, for the less is blessed of the better. Hebron was settled on Caleb and his heirs, because he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel. And happy are we if we follow him. Singular piety shall be crowned with singular favours.

14. Caleb is here called the kenezite, some think, from some remarkable victory obtained by him over the kenezites, as the romans gave their great generals titles from the countries they conquered.—*Henry*.

CHAPTER XV.

Ver. 1—12. *The borders of the lot of Judah.*

After a general survey of the parts of the land then in their possession, Joshua allotted to Judah, Ephraim, and the half of Manassah, their inheritances before they left Gilgal. Afterwards removing to Shiloh, a more extensive and accurate survey was made, and the other tribes had their portions assigned to them by lot also.

The inheritance which Judah actually possessed was large. It was intended that this tribe should have the precedence, and it was the most numerous; though the borders of Judah are here largely fixed, yet not unalterably, for a good deal within these bounds was afterward assigned to Simeon and Dan.

6. As the reubenites had no portion on the west of Jordan, the stone of Bohan, the son of Reuben, is supposed to denote the burial-place either of a son of Reuben, who died while his father was in Canaan, or some great commander of that tribe who died in the camp at Gilgal.

Ver. 13—19. *Caleb's portion and conquest—His daughter's request, and the blessing she obtains.*

The historian seems pleased with every occasion to mention Caleb, and do him honour, because he had honoured God in following him fully. The grant Joshua made of the mountain of Hebron is here repeated. It is said to be a part among the children of Judah; though assigned to him before the lot of the tribe came

up, yet it proved, God so directing it, to be in the heart of that tribe. Caleb having obtained this grant, we are told, He drove thence the three sons of Anak. This is mentioned here, to show that the confidence he had expressed of success in this affair through the presence of God with him, ch. 14. 12, did not deceive him, but the event answered his expectation. It is not said that he slew these giants, but he drove them thence, which intimates that they retired upon his approach. Probably they retired among the philistines.

He encouraged the valour of those about him in the conquest of Debir. It seems, though Joshua had once made himself master of Debir, ch. 10. 39, yet the canaanites regained the possession in the absence of the army, so that the work was to be done a second time. When Caleb had completed the reduction of Hebron, which was for himself and his own family, to show his zeal for the public good he pushes on his conquest to Debir, as the reducing it would be to the general advantage of his tribe. Let us learn, not to seek and mind our own things only, but to concern and engage ourselves for the welfare of the community we are members of: we are not born for ourselves, nor must we live to ourselves.

The name of this city is noticed. It had been called Kirjath-sepher, the city of a book, and Kirjath-sanhah, ver. 49. which some translate, the city of learning, whence some conjecture it had been a university among the canaanites, like Athens in Greece, in which their youth were educated. Or perhaps the books of their chronicles or records of the antiquities of the nation were laid up there. It is not probable that writing and books, in our sense of the word, were common among the canaanites; but they doubtless had learning of some sort, and some method of recording remarkable events. Caleb was earnest to excite the israelites to obtain possession of their inheritance, and by the proposal to give his daughter to him who should take Kirjath-sepher, he employed an expedient well calculated to secure the marriage of his daughter with a worthy man who had an affection for her, and knew the value of an alliance with a person so eminent for faith and piety. Fathers among the jews, and all the ancients, exercised more absolute authority in disposing of their daughters

in marriage, than is usual amongst us, and they were accustomed to acquiesce in the choice made for them.

Othniel, who thus signalized himself when he was young, in his advanced years, was led by the Spirit, to be both a deliverer and a judge in Israel, and was the first person that presided in their affairs after Joshua's death.

Achsah obtained some land by Caleb's free grant, which was allowed while she married within her own tribe and family, as Zelophehad's daughters did. He gave her a south land. Land indeed, but a south land, dry and apt to be parched. She obtained more upon her request. She would have had her husband to ask for a field, probably some particular field which belonged to Caleb, and joined to that land which he had settled upon his daughter at marriage. She thought her husband had the best interest in her father; but he thought it was more proper for her to ask, and she would be more likely to prevail: accordingly she did so, submitting to her husband's judgment, though contrary to her own; and took the opportunity when her father brought her home to the house of her husband. She lighted off her ass, in token of respect and reverence to her father, whom she would honour still, as before her marriage. She expressed some grief and concern, that she might give her father occasion to ask her what she wanted. She calls it a blessing, because it would add much to the comfort of her settlement; and she was sure, that since she married, not only with her father's consent, but in obedience to his command, he would not deny her his blessing. She asks only for the water, without which the ground she had would be of little use, either for tillage or pasture, but she means the field in which the springs of water were. Achsah gained her point; her father gave her what she asked, and perhaps more, for he gave her the upper springs and the nether springs: two fields, so called from the springs that were in them, as we commonly distinguish between the higher field and the lower field. Those who understand it but of one field, watered both with the rain of heaven, and the springs that issued out of the earth, give countenance to the allusion commonly made to this, when we pray for spiritual and heavenly blessings which relate to our souls, as blessings of the upper springs, and those which relate to

the body and the life that now is, as blessings of the nether springs. Indeed, all the blessings, both of the upper and the nether springs, belong to the children of God. As related to Christ, they have the first freely given to them of the Father, as the lot of their inheritance.

From this we learn, 1. That it is no breach of the tenth commandment moderately to desire those comforts and conveniences of this life, which we see attainable in a fair and regular way. 2. That husbands and wives should mutually advise, and jointly agree about that which is for the common good of their family; much more should they concur in asking of their heavenly Father the best blessings, those of the upper springs. 3. That parents must never think that lost, which is bestowed upon their children for their real advantage, but must be free in giving them portions as well as maintenance, especially when they are dutiful. Caleb had sons, 1 Chron. 4. 15, yet gave liberally to his daughter. Those parents forget themselves and their relation, who grudge their children what is convenient for them, when they can conveniently part with it.

17. Kenaz, not Othniel, was brother to Caleb. The word brother is also commonly used for any kinsman.—*Poole*.

Ver. 20—63. *The cities of Judah.*

Here is a list of the several cities within the lot of the tribe of Judah. One hundred and fourteen cities besides villages, without including those afterwards given to the simeonites. Even though most of them were small, yet the land must have been very populous. The cities are named, and numbered in several classes, the reason of which they then could account for. Thirty-eight are named, and yet said to be twenty-nine, because nine were afterward transferred to the lot of Simeon, and are reckoned as belonging to that, as appears by comparing ch. 19. 2, &c.; therefore those only are counted which remained to Judah. Others said to be in the valley are counted to be fourteen, yet fifteen are named; but it is probable, that Gederah and Gederothaim were either two names, or parts, of the same city.

We do not here find Bethlehem, afterwards the city of David, and ennobled by the birth of our Lord Jesus in it. That city, which at the best was but little among the thousands of Judah,

Micah 5. 2, except that it was thus dignified, was now so little as not to be accounted one of the cities, but perhaps was one of the villages not named. Christ came to give honour to the places he was related to, not to receive honour from them. Jerusalem is said to continue in the hands of the jebusites, for the children of Judah could not drive them out, through their sluggishness, stupidity, and unbelief. Had they attempted it with vigour and resolution, we have reason to think God would have given them success; but they could not do it, because they would not. Jerusalem was afterward to be the holy city, the royal city, the city of the great King, the brightest ornament of all the land of Israel; God designed it should be so. It may be justly looked upon as a punishment of the neglect to conquer other cities which God had given them, that they were so long kept out of this. Many cities of this tribe are spoken of in the history of David's troubles. The wilderness of Judah he frequented much. In it John the Baptist preached, and there the kingdom of heaven commenced, Matt. 3. 1. The riches of this country, no doubt, answered Jacob's blessing of this tribe, Gen. 49. 8. And in general, Judah, "thou art he whom thy brethren should praise," not envy.

62. The city of Salt was near the Dead sea, and is supposed to have been the same as Zoar.

63. Jerusalem was taken by Joshua, with the lands around it, Josh. 10. 5, &c.; but the fortress or strong-hold of Zion continued to be held by the jebusites. The israelites not immediately peopling all the cities they had taken, the jebusites recovered possession of the city till they were driven out after the death of Joshua, Judges 1. 8. But the fortress of Zion was held by them till the reign of David, 2 Sam. 5. 6—8. It was called Jebus, from one of the sons of Canaan. From this passage it is evident the book of Joshua was written before the seventh year of David's reign.

Although the cities here enumerated, doubtless, in many instances, were only what would now be called towns, yet the country of Judea formerly was very populous. Josephus mentions that the smallest of what were called cities in his times contained 15,000 inhabitants. The vast population and fertility of Palestine is confirmed by the testimonies of many writers.

CHAPTER XVI.

A general account of the lot of the sons of Joseph—The boundaries of Ephraim.

This and the following chapter should not be separated. They give the lot to the children of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, who, next to Judah, were to

have the post of honour, therefore, had the first and best portion in the northern part of Canaan, as Judah in the southern part. Though Joseph was one of the younger sons of Jacob, yet he was his eldest by his rightful and best beloved wife, Rachel; was himself his best beloved son, and had been the greatest ornament and support of his family; kept it from perishing in a time of famine, and had been the shepherd and stone of Israel. We see his posterity were very much favoured by the lot. Their portion lay in the very heart of the land of Canaan. It extended from Jordan in the east, to the Mediterranean sea in the west, through the whole breadth of Canaan; and, no question, the fruitfulness of the soil was answerable to the blessings of Jacob and Moses, Gen. 49. 25, 26, and Deut. 33. 13, &c. The border of the lot of Ephraim was divided on the south from Benjamin and Dan, who lay between it and Judah, and on the north from Manasseh. Those who aim to draw the line according to the directions here, find themselves much at a loss, the description being short and intricate. The report of those who, in later ages, travelled those countries, will not clear the difficulties, so unlike is it now to what it was then.

A brand is put upon the ephraimites, that they did not drive out the canaanites from Gezer, either through carelessness or cowardice; either for want of faith in the promise of God, that he would give them success if they would make a vigorous effort, or for want of zeal for the command of God, which obliged them utterly to drive out the canaanites, and to make no peace with them. And though they hoped to satisfy the law by putting them under tribute, it shows that they spared them out of covetousness, that they might be profited by their labours, and by dealing with them for their tribute they were in danger of being infected with their idolatry. We find in the sequel of the story, that the israelites were so far from restraining idolatry in others, that they soon fell into it themselves.

Alas! how God's people now suffer his enemies to remain. Blessed Lord, when will all our enemies be subdued? 1 Cor. 15. 26. Do thou drive them all out; thou alone canst accomplish it.—(37.)

Many famous places were within this lot of the tribe of Ephraim, though not mentioned here. The whole kingdom of

the ten tribes is often, in the prophets, especially in Hosea, called Ephraim. And these prescribed boundaries may remind us that our situation and provision in this life, as well as our future inheritance, are appointed by the only wise and righteous God, and we should be content with our portion, since he knows what is best for us, and all we have is more than we deserve.

2. Bethel and Luz are considered to have been the same place. Perhaps they were different parts of the same city.

10. This and other similar observations probably were added after the book of Joshua was first written.

CHAPTER XVII.

Ver. 1—6. *The lot of Manasseh.*

Manasseh was but half of the tribe of Joseph, yet it was divided into two parts, one already settled on the other side Jordan, consisting of the posterity of Machir. Machir was born of Manasseh in Egypt; there he signalized himself, probably in the contest between the ephraimites and the men of Gath, 1 Chron. 7. 21. His warlike disposition descended to his posterity, and Moses gave them Gilead and Bashan, on the east of Jordan. The part on the west of Jordan was divided into ten families.

Here is the claim which the daughters of Zelophehad made, grounded upon the command God gave to Moses concerning them, and the assignment of their portions according to their claim. And now they reaped the benefit of their own pious zeal and prudent forecast in this matter. Those who take care in the wilderness of this world, to make sure to themselves a place in the inheritance of the saints in light, will certainly have the comfort of it in the other world, while those who neglect it now will lose it for ever. O Lord, teach us here to believe and obey, and give us inheritance among thy saints, in glory everlasting.

Ver. 7—13. *The boundaries of Manasseh—The canaanites not driven out.*

Here is a short account of the lot of this half-tribe. Some things are particularly observed concerning this lot. There was great communication between this tribe and that of Ephraim. The city of Tappuah belonged to Ephraim, but the country adjoining to Manasseh; there were likewise many cities of Ephraim, that lay within the border of Manasseh,

as appears by ch. 16. 9. Manasseh likewise had cities with their appurtenances in the tribes of Issachar and Asher. God so ordering it, that though each tribe had its peculiar inheritance, which might not be alienated, yet they should thus intermix one with another, to keep up mutual acquaintance and correspondence between the tribes, and to give occasion for doing good offices one to another, as became those, who, though of different tribes, were all one Israel, and were bound to love as brethren.

They suffered the canaanites to live among them, contrary to the command of God, serving their own ends by conniving at them, for they made them tributaries. The ephraimites had done the same, ch. 16. 10, and from them, perhaps, the manassites learned it.

Ver. 14—18. *Joseph desires a larger portion.*

The children of Joseph quarrelled with their lot without any just cause. Joshua makes them know that in the discharge of his office, as a public person, he had no more regard to his own tribe than to any other, but would administer impartially, without favour or affection; wherein he has left an excellent example to all in public trusts. A very competent provision was made for them; as much, for aught that appears, as they were able to manage, yet they call it in disdain but one lot, as if what was assigned to both was scarcely sufficient for one. The word for complainers, Jude 16, is, "blamers of their lot," like the children of Joseph, who would have that altered, the disposal whereof is from the Lord.

Two things they suggest, to enforce their petition for an augmentation of their lot. 1. They were very numerous, through the blessing of God upon them. Yet observe, when they speak thankfully of their present increase, they do not speak confidently of the continuance of it. The uncertainty of what may be, must not make us unthankful for what has been, and is done in kindness to us. 2. A large part of that country which was now fallen to their lot, was in the hands of the canaanites, and they were formidable enemies, when they brought into the field of battle chariots of iron, ver. 16, that is, chariots with long scythes fastened to the sides, or the axle-tree, which made great destruction, mowing down all that came in their way like corn.

Joshua tells them, that what was fallen

to their share would be a sufficient lot for them both, if they would but work and fight. They desired a lot in which they might indulge in ease and luxury. No, says Joshua, you must not count upon that. He retorts their own argument, that they were a great people. If so, you are the better able to help yourselves, and have the less reason to expect help from others. If thou hast many mouths to be filled, thou hast twice as many hands to be employed; earn, and then eat. You are better able to labour and to fight.

Men are disposed to excuse themselves from labour by any pretence; and nothing serves the purpose better than having rich and powerful relations able to provide for them; though this were done by a partial and unfaithful disposal of what is intrusted to them. But there is more real kindness in pointing out the advantages within our reach, and in exciting and encouraging to due improvement of them, than in granting any indulgence to sloth and extravagance. True religion gives no countenance to these evils. The apostolic rule is, They shall not eat who will not work; and many of our "cannots" are only the language of sluggishness, which magnifies every difficulty into an impossibility, and represents every danger as inevitable destruction.

This is especially the case in our spiritual work and warfare; but even our professed relation to the Captain of the Lord's host will not excuse our sloth and timidity. Our very complaints that comforts are withheld, and that our souls are joyless, frequently result from our indolence, and our fear of the cross. Though we are convinced that without Christ we can do nothing, we are apt to sit still and attempt nothing. But whom he loves he rebukes; if we belong to him, he will stir us up to diligence, boldness, and perseverance in well doing. He requires us to break our league with every lust, and to renounce our worldly pleasures and sinful interests; to shake off our sloth, and to rise superior to our fears; to exert our best endeavours, and to cry to him for help. Then our coast will be enlarged, 1 Chron. 4. 9, 10, our complainings silenced, or rather turned into joyful thanksgivings; and if the Lord hath blessed us hitherto, we should thereby be shamed out of our distrust and repinings. We straiten ourselves by

apprehending the difficulties in the way of our enlargement to be greater than really they are. What may not be overcome by faith and holy resolution?

CHAPTER XVIII.

Ver. 1. *The tabernacle set up at Shiloh.*

The tribes of Judah, Ephraim, and Manasseh were settled in their possessions; perhaps others were dispersed in some parts of the land; it was, therefore, proper that the ark should be removed to a more convenient situation than Gilgal. Shiloh was selected for that purpose, doubtless by direction from the Lord. This city was in the centre of the land, most convenient for all the tribes; and it was fitting that the ark and the tabernacle, which were the glory and defence of the whole land, and sanctified it, should be in the midst of it. Shiloh was in the lot of Ephraim, the tribe to which Joshua belonged, and it was proper that the sanctuary should be near the residence of the chief governor. As the name of this city is the same as that by which Jacob predicted the Messiah, Gen. 49. 10, it is supposed by some that the city was thus called on this occasion, when it was selected for the resting place of the ark, and for the observance of all those institutions which typified our great Peace-maker, and access to a reconciled God through his atonement and intercession.

Mention is made, on this occasion, of the land being subdued before them; the country, thereabouts at least, being thoroughly reduced, they met with no opposition, nor were they apprehensive of any danger, but thought it time to make this grateful acknowledgment of God's goodness to them in the constant series of successes with which he had blessed them. It was a good presage of a comfortable settlement to themselves in Canaan, when their first care was to see the ark well settled, as soon as they had a safe place ready to settle it in. Here the ark continued about three hundred years, till the sins of Eli's house caused the loss of it, and ruined Shiloh.

1. Shiloh was situated on an eminence, about fifteen miles north of Jerusalem. Nothing but the ruins of it remained in Jerome's time: among these the foundations of the great altar were to be discerned. The allotment of Judah was to the south of Shiloh, those of Ephraim and Manasseh to the north of it, ver. 5.

Ver. 2—10. *The remainder of the land described and divided.*

The people, enriched with the plunder of the canaanites, and living in plenty upon the labours of their conquered enemies, seem to have been more intent on present ease and indulgence, than upon obtaining possession of their inheritance; which could not be done without new dangers and fatigues, from which they were averse. In the mean time the canaanites recovered strength and courage; much of the land remained unoccupied and uncultivated. After a year or more consumed in this indolent manner, while they remained ignorant of much of the land, which was not yet divided among them, Joshua reproved their slackness, and directed them how to proceed.

Many are diverted from real duties, and debarred from real comforts, by seeming difficulties. God, by his grace, has given us a title to a good land, the heavenly Canaan, but we are slack to take possession; we enter not into that rest, as we might by faith, and hope, and holy joy; we live not in heaven, as we might, by setting our affections on things above, and having our conversation there. How long shall it be thus with us? How long shall we thus stand in our own light, and forsake our own mercies for lying vanities? Joshua was sensible of the inconveniences of this delay, that while they neglected to take possession of the land that was conquered, the canaanites were recovering strength and spirit, and fortifying themselves in the places that were yet in their hands, which would make the total driving of them out the more difficult. They would lose their advantages by not following their blow; therefore, as an eagle stirreth up her nest, so Joshua stirs them up to take possession of their lots. He is ready to do his part, if they will do theirs.

We must suppose that some survey had been made previously to the allotment of portions to the beforementioned tribes; but it had not been sufficiently general and exact. Three persons, therefore, were chosen out of every tribe, that it might be done impartially; they made as exact an admeasurement and description of the country as they could, that the remaining land might be divided into seven parts, and the seven tribes have their inheritances, the situation being determined by lot, and the quantity pro-

portioned to their numbers. While the surveyors were employed in this perilous work, doubtless they were imboldened and protected of God, and they all returned in safety to Shiloh, to Joshua, who, with religious solemnity, cast lots for them before the Lord. After this survey it appeared that Judah's portion had been made disproportionately large, therefore Simeon's portion was taken out from it; and the lot of Dan also seems to have fallen within the limits first described for Judah.

9. The egyptians understood and practised land-surveying as a science: from them the israelites might have learned the art.

Ver. 11—28. *The boundaries of Benjamin.*

The lot of the tribe of Benjamin Providence cast next to Joseph on the one hand. Benjamin was own and only brother to Joseph. And next to Judah on the other hand, that this tribe might hereafter unite with Judah in an adherence to the throne of David, and the temple at Jerusalem.

The lots were drawn in Shiloh before the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, ch. 19. 51. His unerring wisdom directed the result. The boundaries of each portion were distinctly drawn, and the inheritance of each tribe exactly defined. All contests and selfish claims were prevented by the wise appointment of God, who allotted the hill and the valley, the corn and pasture, the brooks and rivers, the towns and cities, with a perfection of righteousness against which it was absurdity and impiety to murmur. Is the lot of any servant of Christ cast in affliction and sorrow? It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good. Improve the dispensation, be contented and thankful. Are we in prosperity and peace? It is from above, not of our own desert or attainment. Be humbled when you compare the gift with your own unworthiness. Forget not the hand that gave the good, and hold it ready to be resigned at his will. Consider it as one of those lesser streams which flow from the fountain of love in Jesus Christ, and be quickened in his service. The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord, Prov. 16. 33.—(2.)

14. Or, "made a circuit on the side next the sea towards the south." There was no lake or sea in that part of Benjamin which was on their western boundary. Dr. Fuller suggests it may refer to the pool of Gibeon, 2 Sam. 2. 13; Jer.

41. 12. Or, the word here translated "sea" is sometimes rendered "west."

CHAPTER XIX.

Ver. 1—9. *The lot of Simeon.*

Simeon's lot was within that of Judah. The part of the children of Judah was more than they needed, and more, as it proved, than fell to their share. The men of Judah did not oppose the taking away the cities, which by the first distribution fell within their border, when convinced that they had more than their proportion. If the true believer have engaged to those things which are likely to prove injurious to him, he will not retract or disappoint those who have confided in him; but if he have obtained an unintended and *improper* advantage in any contract, he will give it up without murmuring. Love seeketh not her own, and doth not behave unseemly; it will, therefore, induce those in whom it richly dwells, to part with their own superfluity to supply what is lacking to their brethren.

That which was thus taken from Judah to be put into a new lot, Providence directed to the tribe of Simeon. Jacob's prophecy concerning this tribe was, I will divide them in Jacob; see Gen. 49. 6, 7. The cities of Simeon were scattered in Judah, with which tribe they were surrounded, except on that side toward the sea. This brought them into confederacy with Judah, Judg. 1. 3, and afterward was a happy occasion of the adherence of many of this tribe to the house of David, at the time of the revolt of the ten tribes to Jeroboam, 2 Chron. 15. 9, Out of Simeon they fell to Asa in abundance. It is good to be in a good neighbourhood.

Ver. 10—16. *The lot of Zebulun.*

The lot of Zebulun was washed by the great sea on the west, and by the sea of Tiberias on the east, answering Jacob's prophecy, Gen. 49. 13. Zebulun shall be a haven of ships, trading ships on the great sea, fishing ships on the sea of Galilee.

We may observe, that in the division of lands to each of the tribes of Israel the prophetic blessings of Jacob were all exactly accomplished. They either chose for themselves, or it was divided to them by lot, just in the manner and places that he foresaw, so very sure a rule to go by, as St. Peter observes, is the word of prophecy: we see by it what to believe, and

it proves beyond all controversy the things that are of God.—(68.)

Ver. 17—51. *The lots of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan.*

Here is the description of the lots of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan, which concludes the account of the settlement of the twelve tribes. Joshua waited until all the tribes were settled, before he required any provision for himself. He was content to be unfixed, till he saw them all placed, and herein is a great example to all in public places; to prefer the common welfare before their particular satisfaction. He desired to have Timnath-serah, not a city of great note, nor situated in the best of the land, but it lay in the lot of his own tribe, not far from Shiloh, where the ark of God was placed. Those who labour most to do good to others, will, in proportion, be indifferent about their own worldly interests, and willing to forego all things, rather than preclude themselves from communicating happiness to others. An inheritance in the Canaan above, they must and do covet: but it will be soon enough to enter thereon when they have done all the service to their brethren of which they are capable. Nor can any thing more effectually assure them of their title to it, than endeavouring to bring others to desire, to seek, and to obtain possession of it. But Jesus hath far outdone all others in this and every other respect. Though he was rich, for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich. Our Lord Jesus came and dwelt among us, not in pomp but poverty, providing rest for us, yet himself not having where to lay his head. For Christ pleased not himself. Nor would he enter upon his inheritance, till by his obedience to death he had secured the eternal inheritance for all his people; nor will he account his own glory completed till every ransomed sinner is put in possession of his heavenly rest.

When he shall have allotted the thrones and sceptres and posts of spiritual service to those who shall be kings and priests unto God, he will not leave them alone, but will come to them, and take up his abode with them.—(2.)

34. The Septuagint only says, "to Jordan." It is certain that the land of the tribe of Judah cannot be here meant, as it was considerably to the southward. There may have been a city of that name on the borders of Naphtali.

It may be here remarked, that this account of the division of the land and the state of the cities, is according to the first allotment. Some trifling alterations afterwards took place, which are not noticed in this book. This minute and careful division tended to preserve a constant distinction of the various families and tribes, whereby the descent and parentage of the promised Messiah were clearly ascertained.

CHAPTER XX.

Ver. 1—6. *The law concerning the cities of refuge.*

When the israelites were settled in their promised inheritance they were reminded to separate the cities of refuge, whose use and typical meaning have been explained, Numb. 35; Deut. 19. As soon as God had given them cities of rest, he bade them appoint the cities of refuge, to which none of them knew but they might be glad to escape. Thus God provided, not only for their ease at all times, but for their safety in time of danger, and such times we must expect and prepare for in this world. And it intimates what God's spiritual Israel have, and shall have in Christ and heaven; not only rest to repose themselves in, but refuge to secure themselves in. And we cannot think these cities of refuge would have been so often and so much spoken of in the law of Moses, and have had so much care taken about them, when the intention of them might have been answered, as it is in our law, by authorizing the courts of judgment to protect and acquit the manslayer in those cases wherein he was to have privilege of sanctuary, if they were not designed to typify the relief which the gospel provides for penitent sinners, and their protection from the curse of the law and the wrath of God, in our Lord Jesus, to whom believers flee for refuge, Heb. 6. 18, and in whom they are found, Phil. iii. 9, as in a sanctuary, where they are privileged from arrests; there is now no condemnation to them, Rom. 8. 1.

Ver. 7—9. *The cities appointed as refuges for the manslayer.*

We have here the names of the cities of refuge in the land of Canaan. They are said to *sanctify* these cities, that is the original word for appointed, ver. 7. Not that any ceremony was used to signify the consecration of them; only they did, by a public act of court, solemnly declare them cities of refuge; and as such, sacred to the honour of God as the Pro-

tector of exposed innocency. If they were sanctuaries, it was proper to say, they were sanctified. Christ, our Refuge, was sanctified by his Father; nay, for our sakes he sanctified himself, John 17. 19. These cities, as those also on the other side Jordan, stood in the three several parts of the country so conveniently, that a man might in half a day reach one of them from any corner of the country. Kedesh was in Naphtali, the most northern tribe; Hebron in Judah, the most southern; and Shechem in Ephraim, which lay in the middle, about equally distant from the other two. God is indeed a Refuge at hand. They were all levites' cities, which put an honour upon God's tribe, making them judges in the cases wherein Divine Providence was so nearly concerned, and protectors to oppressed innocence. It was also a kindness to the poor refugee, that when he might not go up to the house of the Lord, nor tread his courts, yet he had the servants of God's house with him, to instruct him, and pray for him, and help to make up the want of public ordinances. If he must be confined, it shall be to a levite city, where he may, if he will, improve his time.

Some observe a significance in the names of these cities with application to Christ our Refuge. Kedesh signifies holy, and our refuge is the holy Jesus. Shechem, a shoulder, and the government is upon His shoulder. Hebron, fellowship, and believers are called into the fellowship of Christ Jesus our Lord. Bezer, a fortification, for he is a strong-hold to all them that trust in him. Ramoth, high or exalted, for Him hath God exalted with his own right hand. Golan, joy or exultation, for in Him all the saints are justified, and shall glory.

CHAPTER XXI.

Ver. 1—8. *The appointment of cities for the levites.*

The levites waited till the other tribes were provided for, before they preferred their claim to Joshua. They were excluded from any inheritance of land among their brethren, but were entitled to the tithes, first-fruits, &c., and had forty-eight cities with suburbs for their habitation. But they had not their lot assigned them till they made their claim. There is an inheritance provided for all the saints,

that royal priesthood, but then they must petition for it: Ask, and it shall be given you. They build their claim upon a very good foundation; not their own merits or services, but the Divine precept, The Lord commanded, by the hand of Moses, to give us cities—commanded you to grant them, which implied a command to us to ask them. The maintenance of ministers is not an arbitrary thing, left merely to the good-will of the people, that they may let them starve if they please; no, as the God of Israel commanded that the levites should be well provided for, so has the Lord Jesus, the King of the christian church, ordained, and a perpetual ordinance it is, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel, 1 Cor. 9. 14, and should live comfortably.

It is an instance of their humility, modesty, and patience, and levites should be examples of these and other virtues, that they were willing to be served last; and they fared not the worse for it. Let not God's ministers complain if at any time they find themselves postponed in men's thoughts and cares; but let them make sure of the favour of God, and the honour that comes from him, and then they may well enough afford to bear the slights and neglects of men. The levites' petition was granted immediately, without any dispute. When the forty-eight cities were pitched upon, they were divided into four lots, as they lay next together, and then by lot were determined to the four several families of the tribe of Levi. There is a particular providence directing and attending the removes and settlements of ministers, and appointing where they shall fix who are to be the lights of the world.

Ver. 9—42. *The names of the forty-eight cities allotted to the levites.*

A particular account is here of the cities given to the children of Levi out of the several tribes, to be owned and possessed by them as lords and proprietors, and as having the same title to them that the rest of the tribes had to their cities or lands. Others probably lived in these cities besides the priests and levites, as their tenants, to receive the advantage of their instructions, or to carry on trades among them, as the subsequent history indicates. Several things may be observed in this account, besides what was observed in the law concerning it, Numb. 35. The levites were dispersed into all

the tribes; this would find them work, and employ them all for the good of others; for ministers, above all, must neither be idle, nor live to themselves, nor to one another only. Christ left his twelve disciples together, but left orders that they should in due time disperse themselves, that they might preach the gospel to every creature. The mixing of the levites with the other tribes, would be an obligation upon them to walk circumspectly, and as became their sacred function, and to avoid every thing that might disgrace it. By this means they were made to see the eyes of all Israel upon them, therefore saw it their concern to walk so that their ministry might in nothing be blamed.

Every tribe of Israel was adorned and enriched with its share of levites' cities, even those that lay most remote. They were all God's people, and therefore they had all levites among them. First: To show kindness to, as God appointed them, Deut. 12. 19; 14. 29. They were God's receivers, to whom the people might give their grateful acknowledgments of God's goodness, as the occasion and disposition were. Second: To receive advice and instruction from them. When they could not go up to the tabernacle to consult those who attended there, they might go to a levites' city, and be taught the good knowledge of the Lord. As those who attended the altar kept the charge of the Lord, to see that no Divine appointment was neglected there; so they that were scattered in the country had their charge also, which was to see that no idolatrous, superstitious usages were introduced at a distance, and to watch for the souls of God's Israel. Thus did God graciously provide for keeping up religion among them, and that they might have the word nigh them. Yet, blessed be God, under the gospel we have it yet nigher. Upon the whole, it appears that effectual care was taken, that the levites should live both comfortably and usefully; and those, whether ministers or others, for whom Providence has done well, must look upon themselves as obliged thereby to do good, and as their capacities and opportunities are, to serve their generation.

41. It does not appear that Levi, the least tribe of all, had a larger portion than any other tribe, though the number of cities here reckoned is greater than some. For all the cities of the levites are mentioned, but it is evident that divers cities of the other tribes are omitted. Also they had large territories around them which the le-

vites had not.—*Poole*. By this distribution of the levitical cities, the national worship was kept up, and the education of youth continued.

Ver. 43—45. *God gave the land and rest unto the israelites, according to his promise.*

Here is the conclusion of this whole matter; the foregoing history summed up, and compared with the promise of which it was the full accomplishment. God's word and his works mutually illustrate each other. The performance makes the promise appear very true, and the promise makes the performance appear very kind. God had promised to give the seed of Abraham the land of Canaan for a possession, and now at last he performed that promise; *they possessed it, and dwelt therein*. Though they had often forfeited the benefit of that promise, and God had long delayed the performance, yet at last, all difficulties were conquered, and Canaan was their own. And the promise of the heavenly Canaan is as sure to all God's spiritual Israel; for it is the promise of him that cannot lie. God had promised to give them rest in that land, and now they had rest round about. Though canaanites remained, yet none that had either strength or spirit to attack them. This rest continued, till the israelites, by their own sin and folly, put thorns into their own beds and their own eyes.

God had promised to give them victory and success in their wars, and this promise likewise was fulfilled, There stood not a man before them. It is true, the canaanites afterward made head against them, and became very formidable. But the present remains of the canaanites were no contradiction to the promise, for God had said he would not drive them out all at once, but by little and little, *Exod. 23. 30*. The israelites had now as much in their full possession as they had occasion for; so that the canaanites only kept possession of some of the less cultivated parts of the country against the beasts of the field, till Israel, in process of time, should become numerous enough to replenish them. The after-prevalence of the canaanites was the effect of Israel's cowardice and slothfulness, and the punishment of their sinful inclination to the idolatries and other abominations of the heathen whom the Lord would have cast out before them, but that they harboured and indulged them.

The foundation of God ever stands sure. Israel's experience of God's fidelity

is here upon record, and is the vindication of his promise which had been so often distrusted, and the encouragement of all believers to the end of the world. There failed not any good thing, nor aught of any good thing, (so full is it expressed,) which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel, but in due time all came to pass, *ver. 45*. In due season all his promises will be accomplished to his true people—then will they acknowledge that the Lord hath exceeded their largest expectations, and made them more than conquerors, and brought them to their desired rest and inheritance. The inviolable truth of God's promise, and the performance of it to the utmost, is what all the saints have been ready to bear testimony to; and if in any thing it has seemed to come short, they have been as ready to own that they themselves must bear all the blame. Let no true believer despond because of delays, tribulations, and temptations; for God hath confirmed his promise and covenant with an oath, that we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us. Let us, then, beg of him to enable us to confide in him entirely, obey him unreservedly, and wait for him patiently; for we have need of patience, that after we have done the will of God, we might receive the promise, *Heb. 10. 36*.

44. None of the canaanites were now in arms against Israel. Those who remained paid tribute, which was a clear proof of their being subdued, or, "in the hands" of the israelites.

CHAPTER XXII.

Ver. 1—9. *Reuben and Gad, with the half tribe of Manasseh, dismissed to their homes.*

The men chosen from the two tribes and a half had been absent from home at least seven years, excepting as any of them had visited their families, or had been exchanged for others of their brethren. During this long war they had been obedient to Joshua, and did not attempt to return till he honourably dismissed them. Whether this was done, as it is placed, not till after the land was divided, as some think, or whether after the war was ended, and before the division was made, as others think, because there was no need of their assistance in dividing the land, but only in conquering it, this is certain—it was not done till after Shiloh was made the headquarters, *ch. 21. 2*, and the land was begun

to be divided before they removed from Gilgal, ch. 14. 6.

The work of God, and the welfare of his people, are entitled to preference above our personal interests, our domestic comforts, and relative affections. Every engagement into which we have entered ought to be discharged with strict punctuality, and, if it can be done, to the complete satisfaction of all parties concerned. The believer should be well pleased with serving the cause of Christ upon earth, and be willing to tarry yet longer in this world of warfare, labour, and trouble, and to wait patiently till the Lord Jesus honourably dismisses him.

Thankfulness for mercies received, and love to the brethren, do more with God's children than desire to merit, or necessity. No true israelite, even if he might choose, can sit still beyond Jordan, when all his brethren are in the field.—(34.)

Joshua dismisses the tribes with good counsel to keep up serious godliness. He gave them not political, but pious instructions to take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law. Those who *have* the commandment have it in vain, unless they *do* the commandment; and it will not be done aright, so apt are we to turn aside, and so industrious are our spiritual enemies to turn us aside, unless we take heed, diligent heed. In particular, *to love the Lord our God*, as the best of beings, and the best of friends; and as far as that principle rules in the heart, there will be constant care and sincere endeavour *to walk in his ways*, in all his ways, even those that are narrow and up-hill. In every instance, and in all manner of conversation, *to keep his commandments*. At all times, and in all conditions, with purpose of heart to cleave unto him, and to serve him and his honour, and the interests of his kingdom among men, *with all our heart, and with all our soul*. The good counsel here given to them, is given to us all; God give us grace to take it!

Perfect obedience to the holy law of God, and justification by it as a covenant of works, were no more practicable in the days of Joshua than at present, yet he exhorts to that perfection the spiritual law of God requires. The standard of obedience cannot be too complete; the consciousness of imperfection should cause humiliation; the feeling of our insufficiency will render fervent our prayers for forgiveness and assistance; while, if

we aim only at a low measure of holiness, we shall become self-satisfied, supine, and formal, if not buoyed up with self-sufficiency and spiritual pride.

Joshua dismisses them with a blessing, particularly the half tribe of Manasseh, to which Joshua, as an ephraimite, was nearer related than to the other two. He not only prayed for them as a friend, but blessed them as a father, in the name of the Lord, recommending them, their families and affairs, to the grace of God. Being thus dismissed, they returned to the land of their possession. Though masters of families may have occasion to be absent, long absent, from their families sometimes, yet, when their business abroad is finished, they must remember home is their place, from which they ought not to wander as a bird from her nest.

Ver. 10—20. *They build an altar of testimony—The congregation offended thereat.*

Here is the pious care of the separated tribes to keep their hold of Canaan's religion, when they were leaving Canaan's land. They built a great altar on the borders of Jordan, to be a witness for them that they were israelites, and, as such, partakers of the altar of the Lord, 1 Cor. 10. 18. When they had passed Jordan, they did not consult how to preserve the remembrance of their own exploits in the wars of Canaan, and the services they had done their brethren. But they were solicitous to prepare and perpetuate the proofs and evidences of their relation to the church of God, together with their interest in the communion of saints. Their zeal was commendable, but it should have been guided with discretion; there was no need to hasten the building an altar for the purpose they intended; they might have taken time to consider and take advice; yet, when their sincerity was made to appear, we do not find that they were blamed for their rashness. God does, and men should overlook the weakness of honest zeal.

Notice was immediately brought to the princes of Israel of the setting up this altar. They, knowing how strict and severe that law was, which required them to offer all their sacrifices in the place which God should choose, and not elsewhere, Deut. 12. 5—7, apprehended that the setting up another altar was an affront to the choice God had lately made of a place to put his name in; and that it had a direct tendency to the worship of

some other god, for at first sight it seemed a design to set up a competitor with the altar at Shiloh. God is jealous for his own institutions; we should be so too, and afraid of every thing that looks like, or leads to idolatry.

Their zeal, upon this suspicion, was very commendable. When they apprehended that these tribes, which by the river Jordan were separated from them, were separating from God, they took it as the greatest injury that could be done to themselves. Though these were their brethren, had been companions with them in tribulation in the wilderness, and serviceable to them in the wars of Canaan, yet if they turn to serve other gods, they will treat them as enemies, not as sons of Israel; for so God had appointed, Deut. 13. 12, &c. They are willing to begin a new war, rather than to be wanting in their duty to restrain, repress, and punish idolatry, and every step towards it. A resolution, which shows them hearty for their religion, and we may hope, careful and diligent in the practice of it themselves. Corruptions in religion are best dealt with at first.

Their prudence in prosecution of this zealous resolution is no less commendable. God had appointed them, in cases of this nature, to inquire and make search, Deut. 13. 14, that they might not wrong their brethren under pretence of righting their religion. Thus was their zeal guided and governed by the meekness of wisdom. He that knows all things, and hates all evil things, would first go down and see, Gen. 18. 21, before he would punish the worst of criminals. Many an unhappy strife would be prevented, or soon made up, by impartial and favourable inquiries into the matter of the offence. The ambassadors' management also bespeaks both zeal and prudence. The charge they draw up against their brethren is, indeed, very high. It is well they were not able to make good their charge. But let not innocence think it strange to be misrepresented and accused. They laid to my charge things that I knew not, Psa. 35. 11.

In aggravation of the crime charged upon their brethren, they ask, Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us? Phinehas, the chief person in this treaty, had signaled himself in that matter, Numb. 25. 7. They were not far from the place in which that iniquity was committed. It is good to recollect and improve the in-

stances of the wrath of God revealed from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, which have fallen out in our own time, and which we ourselves have witnessed. The disgrace of the crime of Baal-Peor still lay among them, or rather it may mean that there were many in the congregation who had never truly repented of that wickedness, but who yet lay under the guilt of it, and were disposed to renew the provocation, should opportunity offer. The remembrance of great sins committed formerly, should engage us to stand upon our guard against the least occasions and beginnings of sin; for the way of sin is downhill. It is foolish and dangerous to think former sins little, as those do, who add sin to sin, and so treasure up wrath against the day of wrath. Let, therefore, the time past suffice, 1 Pet. 4. 3.

The reason given for being so warm in this matter is very sufficient; they were obliged to it, in their own necessary defence, by the law of self-preservation; for, If you revolt from God to-day, who knows but to-morrow his judgments may break in upon the whole congregation, as in the case of Achan? The conservators of the public peace are obliged, in justice to the common safety, to use their power for the restraining and so suppressing of vice and profaneness, lest, if it be connived at, the sin thereby become national, and bring God's judgments upon the community. Nay, we are all concerned to reprove our neighbour when he does amiss, lest we bear sin for him, Lev. 19. 17. And the offer made is very fair and kind, that if they thought the land of their possession unclean for want of an altar on which they could offer *expiatory* sacrifices, rather than they should set up another in competition with that at Shiloh, they should be welcome to come to the land where the Lord's tabernacle was, and settle there; the other tribes would straiten themselves to make room. This was the spirit of israelites indeed.

Ver. 21—29. *The answer of the reubenites, &c.*

The reubenites and their associates took the suspicious reproofs, and even the harshness of their brethren, in good part. They did not object to the authority of the elders at Shiloh, or in any manner retort upon them; but with solemnity and meekness they proceeded to explain their intention, and gave their brethren all the satisfaction in their power. Profound

awe and reverence of God are expressed in the *form* of their appeal. The Lord God of gods, the Lord God of gods, he knows. Or, The God of gods, Jehovah, the God of gods, Jehovah, he knows—He is Jehovah, and has sovereignty and supremacy over all beings and powers, even those that are called gods, or that are worshipped. This brief confession of faith would help to remove their brethren's suspicion that they intended to desert the God of Israel, and worship other gods. How could those entertain such a thought, who believed him to be God over all? Let us learn hence always to speak of God with reverence and seriousness, and to mention his name with a solemn pause. Those who make their appeals to Heaven with a slight, careless "God knows," have reason to fear lest they take his name in vain: it is very unlike this.

They express great confidence of their own integrity in the *matter* of their appeal. They refer the controversy to the God of gods, whose judgment is according to truth, such as the guilty have reason to dread, and the upright to rejoice in. "He knows it," for he is perfectly acquainted with the thoughts and intents of the heart, with all inclinations to idolatry, *Psa. 44. 20, 21.* We believe he knows it, and we cannot by any arts conceal it from him. "Let him require it," as we know he will, for he is a jealous God. In every thing we do in religion, it highly concerns us to approve ourselves to God, remembering that he knows the heart. And when we fall under the censures of men, it is very comfortable to be able with humble confidence to appeal to God concerning our sincerity; see *1 Cor. 4. 3, 4.*

An apology is presented to their brethren; "Israel he shall know." Though the record on high, and the witness in our bosoms, are principally to be made sure for us, yet there is a satisfaction besides, which we owe to our brethren who doubt concerning our integrity, and which we should be ready to give with meekness and fear. If our sincerity be known to God, we should study likewise to let others know it by its fruits, especially those who, though they mistake us, show zeal for the glory of God as the ten tribes now did. They also seriously renounce the design of which they were suspected to be guilty. With this they conclude their defence;

"God forbid that we should rebel against the Lord," as we own we should do, if we had set up this altar for burnt-offerings. Far be it from us to think of turning away from following God.

The reubenites fully explain their true intent in building this altar. It was designed for a pledge and preservative of their communion with their brethren, and with the altar of God, and a token of their resolution to do the service of the Lord before him, and to continue to do so. They gave an account of the fears they had, lest, in process of time, their posterity, being seated at a distance from the tabernacle, should be treated as strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, *ver. 24;* and the word signifies a great perplexity and solicitude of mind which they were in, till they devised this expedient. Those cut off from public ordinances, are likely to lose all religion, and will by degrees cease from fearing the Lord. Though the form and profession of godliness are kept up by many without the life and power of it, yet the life and power will not long be kept up without the form and profession. You take away grace, if you take away the means of grace. And those who have themselves found the comfort and benefit of God's ordinances, cannot but desire to preserve and perpetuate them to their seed, and to use all possible precautions that their children after them may not be made to cease from following the Lord, or be looked upon as having no part in him. They explain their design to prevent this; that having this copy of the altar, it might be an evidence of their rights to the privileges of the original altar. Christ is the great Altar that sanctifies every gift; the best evidence of our interest in him will be the work of his Spirit in our hearts, and our conformity to him. If we can produce that, it will be a testimony for us, that we have a part in the Lord, and an earnest of our perseverance in following him.

Ver. 30—34. The children of Israel satisfied.

If there had not been on both sides a disposition to peace, as there was on both sides a zeal for God, the result might have been of ill consequence; for quarrels about religion, for want of wisdom and love, often prove the most fierce and most difficult to be made up. But the ambassadors did not question the sincerity of their protestation; they did not

upbraid with the rashness and unadvisedness of this action; much less did they persist in their charge, because they had once exhibited it, but were glad to have their mistake rectified, and not at all ashamed to own it. Proud and peevish spirits, when they have passed an unjust censure upon their brethren, though convincing evidence be brought of its injustice, can by no means be persuaded to retract. These ambassadors were not so prejudiced; their brethren's vindication pleased them. They looked upon their innocence as a token of God's presence. And when the congregation understood the truth of the matter, it pleased them, and they blessed God. Our brethren's constancy in religion, their zeal for the power of godliness, and their keeping the unity of the Spirit in faith and love, notwithstanding the jealousies conceived of them as breaking the unity of the church, are things of which we should be very glad to be satisfied, and should make the matter both of our rejoicing and of our thanksgiving; let God have the glory of this, and let us take the comfort.

The separated tribes were gratified, and since they had a mind to preserve this pattern of the altar of God, though there was not likely to be occasion for it, yet Joshua and the princes did not order it to be demolished. Thus did the strong bear the infirmities of the weak. But care was taken that as they had explained the meaning of their altar, that it was intended for no more than a testimony of their communion with the altar at Shiloh, this explanation should be recorded, which was done according to the usage of those times, by giving a name to the altar, signifying so much, and they called it, *Ed*, a witness. A witness of the relation they stood in to God and Israel, and of their concurrence with the rest of the tribes in the same common faith, that Jehovah he is God, he and no other. It was a witness to posterity of their care to transmit their religion pure and entire to them, and would be a witness against them if ever they should turn from following after God.

Happy will it be when all professed christians shall learn, in their differences, to copy the example of Israel recorded in this chapter—to unite zeal and steady adherence to the cause of truth, with candour, meekness, and readiness to under-

stand each other, to explain and to be satisfied with the explanations and concessions of their brethren. How long will the spirit of acrimony, misrepresentation, uncandid construction, treating each other with severity, and an obstinate pertinacity in defending every title of a system, and carrying every sentiment to the extreme—how long will these things disgrace religion, and confirm the prejudices of thousands against precious truths? When will christians remember, that by this shall all men know the disciples of Christ, when they have love one for another? when will they recollect, that if they bite and devour one another, they are likely to be consumed one of another? May the Lord increase the number of those who endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; may increasing grace and consolation be with all who love Jesus Christ in sincerity, by whatever name they are distinguished.

Though Joshua, ch. 24. 31, cannot be understood to mean that *all* the people were worshippers of God in spirit and in truth, yet surely it appears that there was a large proportion of people, who, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, were israelites indeed.—(1.)

34. Though the word *Ed* is put in italics by the english translators, it is found in several ancient manuscripts, and in the arabic and syriac versions.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Ver. 1—10. *Joshua's exhortation before his death*
—*He reminds them of benefits received.*

No mention at all is made of the place where this general assembly was held; and there is only a general mention of the time when this was done. It was so long, that Israel had time to feel the comforts of their rest and possessions in Canaan, and to enjoy the advantages of that good land. So long, that Joshua had time to observe their danger of being corrupted by intimacy with the canaanites that remained; against it he is therefore careful to warn them. Joshua was then old and stricken in age; probably it was in the last year of his life, and he lived to be one hundred and ten years old. He himself notices this, in the first words of his discourse. He was old and experienced, therefore to be the more regarded; he was grown old in their service, and had spent himself for their good, therefore was to be the more regarded by

them. He was old and dying; they would not have him long to preach to them, therefore let them observe what he said now, and lay it up in store for the time to come.

The hour of his dismissal was at hand, his warfare was accomplished, his rest prepared. The body was about to return to the dust as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it. But as the planet reflects a more pure and brilliant radiance when it draws nearest to the fountain of light, so will the last hours of such a man be gilded, if sense and strength be allowed him, with a more enlarged communication of the love of God shed abroad in his heart, by the Holy Ghost given him.—(2.)

The scope of the discourse was to engage them, and their seed after them, to persevere in the true faith and worship of the God of Israel. Joshua puts them in mind of the great things God had done for them in his days, and under his administration. Here he goes no further back; and for the proof he appeals to their own eyes. He assures them of God's readiness to carry on and complete this glorious work in due time. He tells them what little need they had to care about numbers. He exhorts them to be very courageous. He presses on them no more than what they were already bound to. Keep with care, do with diligence, and regard with sincerity what is written. Also to be very cautious. Take heed of either a profane neglect of any of God's institutions, or a superstitious addition of any of your own inventions. They must especially take heed of all approaches towards idolatry, the sin to which they were first inclined, and would be most tempted. They must not acquaint themselves with idolaters, nor come among them to visit them, nor be present at any of their feasts or entertainments, for they could not contract any intimacy, or keep up any conversation with them, without danger of infection. They must not show the least respect to any idol, nor make mention of the name of the heathen gods, but endeavour to bury the remembrance of them in perpetual oblivion, that their worship may never be revived. Let the very name of them be forgotten. The paintings, statues, poems, and other things, exquisitely finished by art, but replete with references to the detestable heathen mythology, which abound in our land, tend to habituate us to reflect upon the roman

and grecian idolatry without horror, and promote the cause of scepticism, infidelity, and ungodliness. It is sad, that among christians the names of the heathen gods are so commonly used, and made so familiar as they are, especially in poetry.

Joshua exhorts them to be very constant. There might be many things amiss among them, but they had not forsaken the Lord their God; to give his exhortation to perseverance with the more pleasing power, he praises them. Those that command, should commend; the way to make people better, is to make the best of them.

2. The elders were the princes of the tribes; the heads, the chiefs of families; the judges, those appointed to decide causes; the officers, those who saw to the execution of the laws.

Ver. 11—16. *Joshua warns the people of the consequences of idolatry.*

Joshua directs what was to be done, that they might persevere in religion. Would we cleave to the Lord, and not forsake him, we must always stand upon our guard, for many a precious soul is lost and ruined through carelessness. God has given us precious souls, with this charge, Take good heed to them, keep them with all diligence, above all keepings. What we do in religion, we must do from a principle of love, not by constraint or from a slavish fear of God, but of choice and with delight. Love the Lord your God, and you will not leave him. Joshua urges God's fidelity to them as an argument why they should be faithful to him. He was old and dying—Now that I am near my end, it is proper to look back upon the years that are past; in the review, I find, and ye yourselves know it, in all your hearts, and in all your souls, by full conviction on the clearest evidence, and it has made an impression upon you—that knowledge does us good, which is seated, not in the head only, but in the heart and soul, and with which we are duly affected—Ye know that not one thing hath failed, of all the good things which the Lord spake concerning you, and he speaks of a great many: see ch. 21. 45. Now, said he, has God been thus true to you? Be not you false to him. It is the apostle's argument for perseverance, He is faithful that has promised, Heb. 10. 23.

The experience of every christian attests the same animating truth. His conflict may have been severe and long, his

trials great and many; but when about to enter the eternal haven where he would be, his duty and his privilege will alike lead him to acknowledge that goodness and mercy followed him all the days of his life; and to express a humble persuasion that the God who guided him with his counsel, will afterward receive him into glory.—(2.)

Joshua warns what would be the fatal consequences of apostasy. If you go back, know for a certainty it will be your ruin. He describes the apostasy he warns them against. The first step would be, intimacy with idolaters; the next would be, intermarrying with them, drawn to it by their artifices; and the consequence of that would be, serving their gods. Thus the way of sin is down-hill, and those who have fellowship with sinners cannot avoid having fellowship with sin. Other sins were transgressions of *the law* God commanded them, but this was a transgression of *the covenant* he commanded them, and amounted to a breach of the relation between God and them, and a forfeiture of all the benefits of the covenant.

He describes the destruction he warns them of. He tells them these remainders of the canaanites, if they should harbour and indulge them, and join in affinity with them, would be snares and traps to them; be scourges in their sides, and thorns in their eyes, and by all ways possible be vexatious. The punishment would be made to answer the sin, the sin itself would be the punishment. The anger of the Lord would be kindled against them. All the threatenings of the word would be fulfilled, as the promises had been, for the God of eternal truth is faithful to both. It would end in the utter ruin of their church and nation. It would aggravate their perdition, that the land from which they shall perish is a good land, a land God himself had given them, which he would have secured to them, if they by their wickedness had not thrown themselves out of it. Thus the goodness of the heavenly Canaan, and the free and sure grant God has made of it, will aggravate the misery of those who shall forever be shut out and perish from it. Nothing will make them see how wretched they are, so much as to see how happy they might have been. Joshua thus sets before them the fatal consequences of their apostasy, that, knowing the terror of the Lord, they might be persuaded with purpose of heart to cleave to him. Sin-

ners have indeed cause to tremble at God's indignation. Let us, then, watch and pray against temptation. Let us trust in God's faithfulness, love, and power; let us plead his promises, and cleave to his commandments, and then we shall be happy in life, in death, and for ever.

When we come to heaven, we shall see the truth and faithfulness of God; we shall have all the promises accomplished through Christ, the true Joshua; and be able to say, with joy unspeakable, Not a word hath failed! and all through Christ, the true Joshua. For in him all the promises are yea and amen, 2 Cor. 1. 20, and this will be rest for ever. As they had rest, so now believers enter into an everlasting rest, Heb. 4. 9—11.—(49.)

CHAPTER XXIV.

Ver. 1—14. *Joshua reminds the people of God's benefits to their fathers.*

God graciously continuing Joshua's life longer than he expected, and renewing his strength, he was desirous to improve it for the good of Israel. We must never think our work for God done, till our life is done; if he lengthen out our days beyond what we expected, it is because he has some further service for us to do.

The certainty of his approaching departure made Joshua more anxious to acquit his soul in this last opportunity for the exercise of zeal, fidelity, and affection. Shall not he who humbly aims at the same mind which was in Christ Jesus, glory in bearing the last testimony to his Saviour's goodness, and in impressing upon all around him the obligations with which the unmerited goodness of God has charged them?—(2.)

The assembly is the same with that in the foregoing chapter; but it is more solemn. The place appointed for their meeting is Shechem; that lay nearer to Joshua than Shiloh, and it was the place where Abraham settled at his coming to Canaan, and where God appeared to him, Gen. 12. 6, 7, and near which stood mounts Gerizim and Ebal, where the people renewed their covenant with God on first coming into Canaan, Josh. 8. 30. This place might remind them of the promises God made to their fathers, and the promises they themselves made to God.

They came together in a solemn religious manner, as into the special pre-

sence of God. Joshua spake to them in God's name, and as from him. His sermon consists of doctrine and application. The doctrinal part is a history of the great things God had done for his people, and for their fathers before them. God by Joshua recounts the marvels of old. They must know and consider, not only that such and such things were done, but that God did them. He brought Abraham out of Ur of the chaldees. Abraham, who afterward was the friend of God, was bred up in idolatry, and lived long in it, till God by his grace snatched him as a brand out of that burning. Let them remember that rock out of which they were hewn, and not relapse into that sin from which their fathers by a miracle of free grace were delivered. I took him, says God, else he had never come out of that sinful state. Hence Abraham's justification is made by the apostle an instance of God's justifying the ungodly, Rom. 4. 5. God delivered the seed of Jacob out of Egypt. He protected them in the wilderness, where they are here said, not to wander, but to dwell for a long season, ver. 7. So wisely were all their motions directed, so safely were they kept, that even there they had as certain a dwelling-place, as if they had been in a walled city. He gave them the land of the amorites, on the other side Jordan, and there defeated the plot of Balak and Balaam, so that Balaam could not curse them as he desired, and, therefore, Balak durst not fight them as he designed, and, because he designed it, is here said to do it. God brought them safely and triumphantly into Canaan, delivered the canaanites into their hand, sent hornets before them, which with their stings tormented the enemy, and with their noise terrified them, so that they became an easy prey to Israel. Lastly, they were now in peaceable possession of a good land. The application of this history of God's mercies to them, is by way of exhortation to fear and serve God, in gratitude for his favour, and that it might be continued to them. Therefore, in consideration of all this, Fear the Lord, the Lord and his goodness, Hos. 3. 5. Reverence a God of such infinite power, fear to offend him, and to forfeit his goodness. Keep up continual regard to his all-seeing eye upon you. Let your practice be consonant to this principle, and serve him, both by outward

acts of religious worship, and every instance of obedience in your whole conversation; and this, in sincerity and truth, with a single eye and an upright heart, and inward impressions answerable to outward expressions. Put away strange gods, both chaldean and egyptian idols, for those they were most in danger of revolting to. In this very place Jacob had put away the strange gods which were in his family, and buried them under an oak, Gen. 35. 2, 4.

1. The greek version here, and ver. 25, is, "And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shiloh, and presented them before God."

Ver. 15—28. *Joshua renews the covenant between the people and God.*

The manner of Joshua's dealing with the people shows him to be in earnest, and that his heart was set to leave them under all possible obligations to cleave to God, particularly the obligation of a choice and of a covenant. The Lord has a right to the worship and obedience of all his rational creatures, which cannot be withheld without contracting the deepest guilt, and incurring the severest vengeance. But it is essential that this service be performed with a willing mind. For LOVE is the very substance of it, and the only genuine principle whence all acceptable service of God can spring. A reluctant, unwilling worship and obedience can rise no higher than hypocrisy. The Father seeketh only such to worship him, as worship him in spirit and in truth. But the carnal mind of man is enmity against God, and, therefore, incapable of such spiritual worship. Hence the necessity of being born again. When this necessity and the nature of this change is discovered to our minds, we are induced to seek for it in the use of appointed means; we become consciously and experimentally partakers of it, and are numbered among those who worship God in sincerity and from genuine love. But numbers rest in the mere form, as a task imposed upon them, in the hope to avoid worse consequences.

Joshua puts them to their choice; but not as if it were indifferent whether they served God or not. The will of man is apt to glory in its native liberty, and, in a jealousy for its own honour, adheres with the greatest pleasure to that which is its own choice; therefore it is God's will that this service should be our choice.

There are prejudices and objections

which some people raise against religion, which with those inclined to the world and the flesh, have great force. It seems evil to them, hard and unreasonable, to be obliged to deny themselves, mortify the flesh, take up their cross, and follow Christ. But being in a state of probation, it is fit there should be some difficulties in the way, else there were no trial. He refers it to themselves, Choose you whom ye will serve, choose this day, now that the matter is laid thus plainly before you.

Joshua directs their choice in this matter by an open declaration of his own resolutions. 1. For himself. The service of God is not below the greatest of men; it is their chief honour. 2. For his house, that is, his family, his children, and servants. Joshua was a ruler, a judge in Israel, yet he will not make necessary application to public affairs an excuse for neglect of family religion. Those that have the charge of many families, as magistrates and ministers, must take special care of their own, 1 Tim. 3. 4, 5. When we cannot bring as many as we would to the service of God, we must bring as many as we can, and extend our endeavours to the utmost sphere of our activity: if we cannot reform the land, let us put away iniquity far from our tabernacle. He resolves to do this, whatever others did. Those that resolve to serve God, must not mind being singular therein, Those that are bound for heaven, must be willing to swim against the stream, and must not do as the *most* do, but as the *best* do.

The great thing which will either facilitate or hinder general compliance with the mind of God respecting family religion, is, what consideration men have of their families—whether they consider them as constitutions for this world, or for the world to come. Accordingly as we do this, our compliance with the will of God will be easy or difficult. Surely where the consideration of both worlds meet, the other world should be most thought of, and all things measured with reference thereto. No one can behave himself well in any station, that does not let this thought sink deep into his mind, My family relations have reference to religion, and not to other businesses only.—(40.)

The israelites concur with Joshua, being influenced by the example of so

great a man, who had been so great a blessing to them; We *also* will serve the Lord. See how much good great men might do, by their influence on their inferiors, if they were zealous in religion. They startle at the thought of apostatizing from God, ver. 16. The word intimates the greatest dread and detestation; and they give very substantial reasons for their choice.

Joshua brings them to embrace their religion resolutely, and to express full purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord. In order to this, he sets before them the difficulties of religion, and that which might be thought discouraging in it, ver. 19, 20. Thus, though our master has assured us that his yoke is easy, yet lest, upon the presumption of that, we should grow remiss and careless, he has also told us that the gate is strait, and the way narrow, that leads to life, that we may, therefore, strive to enter, and not seek only. You cannot serve God and mammon; therefore, if you resolve to serve God, you must renounce all competitors with him. You cannot serve God in your own strength, nor will he forgive your transgressions for any righteousness of your own; but all the seed of Israel must be justified and must glory in the Lord alone, as their righteousness and strength, Isa. 45. 24, 25. They must come off from all confidence in their own sufficiency, else their purposes would be in vain.

The service of God being made their deliberate choice, Joshua binds them to it by a solemn covenant. It is here called a statute and an ordinance, because of the strength and perpetuity of its obligation; and because even this covenant bound them no more than they were before bound by the Divine command. But Joshua gives it the formalities of a covenant. He calls themselves to be witnesses; he put it in writing in the book of the law. He set up a great stone under an oak as a monument of it. In this affecting manner Joshua took his last leave of them, having done his part—if they perished, their blood would be upon their own heads.

Though the house of God, the Lord's table, and even the walls and trees before which we have uttered our solemn purposes of serving him, would bear witness against us if we deny him, yet we may trust in him to enable us to fulfil our engagements, and be confident that he will

put his fear into our hearts, that we shall not depart from him. God alone can give grace, yet he greatly approves and blesses earnest endeavours to engage men to his service, and to confirm them therein; and the pious labours of one single day may produce most important and beneficial effects for years, even for generations to come. After a life thus spent and thus concluded, how comfortably may the believer meet the stroke of death, and retire to his rest in the realms of glory!

23. A question has arisen whether the israelites *then* worshipped the idols here mentioned. It is probable some were then in their possession, though not worshipped; but Joshua feared that the people had begun to adore them, or soon might do so.

25. From the circumstance of Joshua having committed this covenant to writing, it is justly inferred that authentic accounts of the other transactions of that period were also preserved by written documents.—*T. H. Horne.*

Ver. 29—33. *Joshua's death—Joseph's bones buried—The state of Israel.*

Here is Joseph buried. He died about two hundred years before in Egypt, but gave commandment concerning his bones, that they should not rest in their grave until Israel had rest in the land of promise: now, therefore, the children of Israel, who had brought his bones with them out of Egypt, and carried them along with them in all their marches through the wilderness, deposited them in that piece of ground which Joseph's father gave him near Shechem, Gen. 48. 22.

Notice also the death and burial of Joshua, and of Eleazar the chief priest, who died about the same time that Joshua did. The most useful men, having served their generation, according to the will of God, one after another fall asleep and see corruption. But Jesus, having spent and ended his life on earth more assiduously and effectually than either Joshua or Joseph, rose from the dead, and saw no corruption. He not only brings his ransomed tribes to their rest, but liveth with them, and reigneth over them, to complete and perpetuate their happiness to all eternity. Wherever their bodies are buried, he will shortly raise them incorruptible, and transform them into the likeness of his own glorious body, according to the

mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.

The redeemed of the Lord shall inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. For it is their Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom. Much has been done in various ways to forward the gracious design; but the full performance is intrusted to Him of whom Joshua was so eminent a type. He is the Captain of the Lord's hosts, who stands engaged to bring them to heaven. This was the object of the Divine counsels from the beginning. For the accomplishment of his purpose, the Son of God relinquished the throne of his glory, became obedient to the law, was made a curse, died, went down to the grave, and rose again; and though he now reigns above, he is carrying on the same work, and with a particular regard to it he will continue to maintain universal dominion, until the redemption of his purchased possession unto the praise of his glory. It will then be confessed that the Lord hath done all things well, in truth as well as in mercy, that he hath fulfilled his covenant, and that not one of all his precious promises has failed. Then what acclamations of joy and gratitude will break forth from all the ransomed of the Lord in Zion! But to whom will the praise be due? They will cry aloud in admiration of the grace of Jesus, Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen, Rev. 1. 5, 6.—(60.)

We have a general idea given us of the state of Israel at this time, ver. 31. While Joshua lived, religion was kept up among them under his care and influence; but soon after he and his contemporaries died, it went to decay. How well is it for the gospel church that Christ, our Joshua, is still with it, by his Spirit, and will be always, even unto the end of the world!

29—33. The last five verses in this chapter, doubtless, were not written by Joshua: no man can give an account of his own death and burial. Phineas or Samuel might have added them, to bring down the narration so as to connect it with their own times, and thus preserve the thread of the history unbroken. Such additions are common in ancient authors.—*A. Clarke.*

ON THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CANAANITES.

In reading the Old Testament account of the Jewish wars and conquests in Canaan, and the terrible destruction brought upon the inhabitants thereof, we are

constantly to bear in our minds that we are reading the execution of a dreadful, but just sentence pronounced by God against the intolerable and incorrigible crimes of those nations—that they were intended to be made an example to the whole world, of God's avenging wrath against sins of this magnitude and this kind; sins which could only be checked by the signal and public overthrow of nations notoriously addicted to them, and so addicted as to have incorporated them even into their religion and their public institutions. Also, we are to remember that the miseries inflicted upon these nations by the invasion of the jews, were expressly declared to be inflicted on account of their abominable sins—that God had borne with them long—that God did not proceed to execute his judgments till their wickedness was full—that the israelites were mere instruments in the hands of a righteous Providence, for effecting the extermination of a people of whom it was necessary to make a public example to the rest of mankind—that this extermination, which might have been accomplished by a pestilence, by fire, by earthquakes, was appointed to be done by the hands of the israelites, as being the clearest and most intelligible method of displaying the power and righteousness of the God of Israel—his power over the pretended gods of other nations, and his righteous hatred of the crimes into which they had fallen.

This is the true statement of the case. It is no forced or invented construction, but the transaction as set forth in scripture.

We may further urge that the idolatry, pollutions, and cruelty of these nations were so abominable, and at the same time so incorrigible, as to justify the moral Governor of the universe in inflicting upon them the most signal and severe punishment, even to extermination, without affording any longer period of trial, or any immediate offer of pardon and mercy; though there is strong probability that an opportunity was given them of accepting peace offered by the israelites, on condition of renouncing idolatry, and yielding their country to the chosen people of God, to whom it was assigned by a grant as clear as the Divine authority bestowing it was supreme—a grant confirmed by most signal miracles, which were certainly known to the inhabitants of Canaan, who were thus forewarned of the Divine authority,

on which their submission was required, and the punishment which would await resistance. After the time of God's forbearance had expired, the canaanites still had the alternative to flee elsewhere, as many did, settling in Africa and even in Spain; or to renounce their idolatries, submit and serve the God of Israel; in which case it appears from several passages that there was mercy for them.

That this national punishment, provoked by national guilt, should involve innocent persons, even smiling babes and infant children, can form no objection to the justice and mercy of God, who will assuredly rectify all inequality of this life at the final manifestation of his majesty. It is in perfect accordance with the usual course of Providence. When famines, plagues, and earthquakes visit a nation for sin, children suffer in the common calamity; many, also, daily fall victims to diseases, or to the vices and crimes of their parents; and for children dying before actual sin, a full provision is made as to their eternal happiness, by the mercy of God in Christ. Admit a future life, and all such difficulties vanish.

And shall we stigmatize the jewish system as sanguinary and cruel, because, under an express Divine command, and for the all-important purposes of establishing, in one chosen people, the worship of the true God, and the principles of true morality, above all, for the purpose of preparing for the gospel, it commanded the extermination of the impious, polluted, and cruel canaanites, thus inculcating horror of idolatry, and proving the superiority of Jehovah over idols, and the Divine wrath against the vices pursued with such signal vengeance? We must ever remember that the israelites were a chosen people, evidently protected and controlled by Divine Providence, expressly appointed to be the depositaries and preservers of true religion and moral virtue, by whose instrumentality all the nations of the earth have been blessed—blessed by the establishment of christianity.

The general system of these events is strictly analogous to the course of moral government constantly exercised in the world, with this only difference, that the measures of Divine administration which in other cases are carried into effect by the secret influence, and, as it were, tacit permission, of the Supreme moral Governor, were here executed by his

avowed interposition and immediate authority.

It cannot be viewed as repugnant to reason, that God should, by an express act of his providence, destroy a wicked nation. We may ever consider the goodness of God as the leading principle of his conduct towards mankind, and his justice as subservient to his mercy. He punishes individuals and nations; but all his punishments originate in his abhorrence of sin, are calculated to lessen its influence, and are proofs of his goodness—happiness cannot be communicated to the human race while they continue servants of sin. The destruction of the canaanites exhibits to all nations, in all ages, a signal proof of God's displeasure against sin; it has been to others, and it is to ourselves, a benevolent warning.

It may be further remarked that the destruction of the canaanites was not effected wholly by the israelites, even as instruments. The Lord himself, partly by storms and tempests, by noxious insects, and by terror infused into the minds of the people, expelled, perhaps, more than the israelites themselves. Had they been wholly destroyed by earthquake, storm, or plague, women and infants would have been equally included in the destruction; but who would have disputed the Divine justice and authority? The israelites acted as the messengers of Divine vengeance; there are abundant proofs that what they did was by express command, and not from choice. Many circumstances show that they executed these commands with reluctance, and needed frequent urging to the painful work. It no where appears that the israelites contracted any ferocious habits by this exterminating war, or that they were guilty of barbarities, such as have been committed in other cases. It is an historical fact that they were of a much milder character than any other nation of antiquity—a fact which shows the salutary influence of the Divine law. Neither can the most remote shadow of argument be adduced to prove that Moses carried on warfare under the pretext of religion. He made no proselytes by the sword; nor did he, or any person mentioned with approval in scripture, make war on any nation beyond the borders of the promised land, because they were idolaters. Assuredly, the Divine com-

mission distinguishes this case from others recorded in history, infinitely more than a warrant from authority distinguishes the executioner from the murderer.

To neglect the circumstances which explain and vindicate the severity exercised against the canaanites by the Divine command, and on account of their punishment to reject the whole of REVELATION, is incredulity and presumption equally irrational and irreligious. Let it be our part to weigh the dispensations of Providence with humility; let us derive new motives to watchfulness and holy obedience, from the severity as well as the mercy of the Divine administration.

These observations will supply sufficient materials to refute the cavils and objections of *the opposers of revelation*. The REAL CHRISTIAN needs not lengthened arguments. He knows that the canaanites had been borne with much long-suffering; they had been warned; and He was "just in the judgments" which he inflicted upon them. Having exhausted the patience of God by their crimes and impieties, he resolved to cut them off, and was pleased to employ his chosen people as instruments in accomplishing the purposes of his justice.

We are all reminded that, like the war waged with the canaanites, no tenderness must be indulged towards our spiritual enemies. In this day of salvation, the long-suffering of God waits to lead us to repentance. But the revelation of the righteous judgment of God will at length be made against those who reject the message of his love and the offers of his Son. The wicked will then be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. The final sentence of ruin passed upon the canaanites will be only a type of that which the obstinate and rebellious must undergo. As universal will be the punishment of those who obey not the gospel of truth. The omniscient Judge will condemn them to that state where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. The wrath of God will visit the sinner; but it shall not come nigh the sincere believer in Christ.

OUR GOD—HIS WORK IS PERFECT; FOR ALL HIS WAYS ARE JUDGMENT; A GOD OF TRUTH AND WITHOUT INIQUITY, JUST AND RIGHT IS HE, Deut. 32. 4.

THE BOOK OF JUDGES.

The book of Judges is the history of the commonwealth of Israel, during the government of the judges, from the death of Joshua to Eli, so much of it as God saw fit to transmit to us, during about three hundred years. The judges were not a regular succession of governors, but occasional deliverers, raised up by God as circumstances required, to rescue Israel from their oppressors, to reform the state of religion, and to administer justice to the people. Without assuming the state of royal authority, they were in fact the immediate vicegerents of Jehovah, the King in Israel.

The state of God's people does not appear in this book so prosperous, nor their character so religious, as might have been expected from what is related in the preceding books; but we may suppose that there were many believers among them, and that the tabernacle service was attended to, notwithstanding the lamentable defection in their national character. And the whole period under the judges must not be mistaken, as sometimes it is, for an uninterrupted series of idolatries and crimes. The lapses which incurred punishment, and the deliverances which attended repentance, are related so fully and distinctly as to occupy almost the whole narrative; while long periods when, under the government of the judges, the people followed God and the land enjoyed peace, are passed over in a single verse. Some of the disorders here mentioned only affected parts of the country, while the rest was in a better state. From amidst the scenes of civil discord and violence which darken this history, St. Paul has presented us with some illustrious examples of faith in the epistle to the Hebrews. The history itself abundantly verifies the frequent warnings and predictions of Moses, and should have our close attention.

The whole narrative is full of important instruction. It furnishes us with a lively description of an unsettled nation. A striking picture of the disorders and dangers which prevailed when without magistracy, when "the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways," 5. 6, when there were few prophets to control the people, and "every one did that which was right in his own eyes," ch. 17. 6. It illustrates the scripture doctrine of the corrupt bias of our fallen nature, and shows how prone men are to be drawn aside to ungodliness and false religion. It shows the fatal effects of sin upon all our comforts and prospects. It manifests the justice and holiness, the power and truth of God, in performing both his promises and threatenings—also his patience, compassion, and mercy. The nature and advantages of repentance and obedience, with the happiness of those who trust in the Lord and serve him, are displayed in a very affecting manner. The contents of this book are calculated to make the reader watchful and circumspect; to warn those who think they stand, to take heed lest they fall, and to encourage those who are fallen, to return to our merciful God in the way he has pointed out.

There is much of gospel shades and types, both as to persons and things, in the book of Judges. The Holy Ghost caused many striking allusions to the great events of salvation, to be represented during the period of the church which this book refers to. And several persons whose history forms a part in this scripture were eminent types and shadows of the Lord Jesus.

The book of Judges is ascribed to different writers, but the best founded opinion seems to be that it was written by Samuel the last of the judges. There is considerable difficulty in settling the chronology of this book. In the following arrangement, an attempt is made to reduce it to something like order.

Part I.—The state of the israelites after the death of Joshua, until they began to turn aside from serving the Lord, ch. 1. to 3. ver. 4. B. C. 1443 to 1413.

Part II.—The history of the oppressions of the israelites, and their deliverances by the judges.

1. The subjection of the eastern israelites to the king of Mesopotamia, and their deliverance by Othniel, ch. 3. 5—11. B. C. 1413 to 1405.

2. The subjection of the eastern israelites to the king of Moab, and their deliverance by Ehud. The western israelites delivered by Shamgar, ch. 3. 12—31. B. C. 1343 to 1325.

3. The northern israelites oppressed by Jabin king of Canaan, delivered by Deborah and Barak, and Sisera overthrown, ch. 5. B. C. 1285.

4. The eastern and northern israelites delivered from the midianites by Gideon, with the history of Gideon and his family, ch. 6—9. B. C. 1252 to 1233.

5. The administrations of Tola and Jair. The israelites, oppressed by the ammonites, are delivered by Jephthah. The administrations of Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon, ch. 10—12. B. C. 1233 to 1157.

6. The servitude of the israelites to the philistines, and their deliverance by Samson, with his history, ch. 13—16. B. C. 1155 to 1117.

Part III.—An account of the introduction of idolatry among the israelites, and their consequent corruption, for which God gave them up into the hands of their enemies, exemplified.

1. By an account of the idol of Micah and its worship, ch. 17. 18. B. C. 1419.

2. The detestable violence and murder committed by the benjamites of Gibeah, and its consequences, ch 19—21. B. C. 1419 to 1413.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1—8. *Proceedings of the tribes of Judah and Simeon—Adoni-bezek justly requited.*

THE israelites were convinced that the war against the canaanites was to be continued; but they were in doubt as

to the manner in which it was to be conducted after the death of Joshua, and which tribe was to have the precedence.

In these respects they inquired of the Lord, probably by Urim and Thummim. God appointed that Judah should go up

first, and promised him success. And why must Judah be first in this undertaking? Judah was the most numerous and powerful tribe, therefore, let Judah venture first. God appoints service according to the strength he has given. From those who are most able, most work is expected. Judah was first in dignity, and must be first in duty. He it is whom his brethren praise, and, therefore, he it is who must lead in perilous services. Let the burdens of honour and of work go together. Judah was the tribe out of which our Lord was to spring; so that in Judah, Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, went before them. Christ engaged the powers of darkness first, and foiled them, which animates us for our conflicts; and it is in him that we are more than conquerors. The service and the success are put together. Judah's service will not avail unless God give success; but God will not give the success, unless he vigorously apply himself to the service.

Judah prepares to go up, but asks the tribe of Simeon to join him. The strongest should not despise, but desire the assistance even of the weaker. Judah was the most considerable of all the tribes, and Simeon the least; yet Judah begs Simeon's friendship, and prays aid from him. Those who crave assistance must be ready to give assistance. Come with me into my lot, then I will go with thee into thine. It becomes israelites to help one another against canaanites; and all christians, even those of different tribes, to strengthen one another's hands against the common interests of Satan's kingdom. Those who thus help one another in love, have reason to hope that God will graciously help both. God gave them great success. Though the army of Judah was strong and bold, yet the victory is attributed to God; he delivered the canaanites into their hand. We meet not with such religious expressions in the heathen writers, concerning the success of their arms, as we have here and elsewhere in the sacred history. It is much to be wished that such pious acknowledgments of the Divine providence were not grown into disuse at this time, with many that are called christians.

We are told how the army of the canaanites was routed, and how their king Adoni-bezek was taken prisoner; and we are told how they used him. See how

changeable this world is, and how slippery its high places are. Let not the highest be proud, nor the strongest secure, they know not how low they may be brought before they die. This prince had been a great warrior, and a severe tyrant over his vanquished enemies. Seventy petty princes of those times and countries had been his prisoners. Having disabled them, with great disgrace and pain, by cutting off their thumbs and great toes, he forced them to gather their food, as dogs, under his table. The israelites, doubtless under the Divine direction, retaliated upon him, and his own conscience extorted a confession of the justice of God in this punishment—how justly he was treated as he had treated others. Thus the righteous God sometimes, in his providence, makes the punishment to answer the sin. Those who showed no mercy, shall have no mercy showed them, Jam. 2. 13: see Rev. 13. 10; 18. 6.

7. An ancient and common mode of treating enemies, by which they were prevented from engaging in warfare.—*A. Clarke.*

8. See note, Joshua 15. 63.

Ver. 9—20. *Hebron and other cities taken—Caleb's daughter given to Othniel to wife—The kenites dwell in Judah.*

The lot of Judah was almost cleared of the canaanites, but not thoroughly. Those that dwelt in the mountains were driven out, ver. 9, 19; but those in the valley kept their ground against them, having chariots of iron, such as we read of, Josh. 17. 16. Here the men of Judah failed, and thereby spoiled the influence, which otherwise their example might have had on the rest of the tribes, who followed them in this instance of their cowardice, rather than in all the other instances of their courage. The canaanites had iron chariots, therefore it was thought not safe to attack them; but had not Israel God on their side, whose chariots are thousands of angels, Psa. 68. 17, before whom these iron chariots would be but as stubble to the fire? Had not God expressly promised to give them success against the canaanites in this very expedition, without excepting the iron chariots? Yet they suffered their fears to prevail against their faith.

Caleb was put in possession of Hebron. We had this passage, Josh. 15. 16—19.

In the eastern part of Simeon's lot they destroyed the canaanites in Zephath, and called it Hormah, Destruction, adding this to other devoted cities not far off, which

had been, with good reason, called by that name, Numb. 21. 2, 3. This, perhaps, was the complete performance of the vow then made, that they would utterly destroy these cities of the canaanites in the south. In the western part they took Gaza, Askelon, and Ekron, cities of the philistines; they gained present possession of the cities, but not destroying the inhabitants, the philistines recovered the cities, and proved inveterate enemies to Israel; no better could come of doing their work by halves.

The kenites gained a settlement in the tribe of Judah. These were the posterity of Jethro, to whom Moses promised that they should fare as Israel fared, Numb. 10. 32. They had at first seated themselves in the city of palm-trees, that is, Jericho, a city not to be rebuilt, therefore the fitter for those who dwelt in tents. Afterward they removed into the wilderness of Judah, it was solitary and retired, or from affection to that tribe. Yet we find the tent of Jael, who was of that family, far north, in the lot of Naphtali, ch. 4. 11. Israel let them fix where they pleased, being a quiet people, who, wherever they were, were content with a little. They that molested none, were molested by none. Blessed are the meek, for thus they shall inherit the earth.

18. The greek version is, "Though Judah did not take possession of Gaza, nor the borders thereof, nor of Ascalon," &c.

19. Observe, that when it was said *he* drove out, &c., it refers to Judah. Judah had often displayed much more eminent instances of his power, and he that effected the greater, certainly could have effected the less. Though it pleased God to give success to Judah in one instance, it does not necessarily follow that he should give it in all. There is no reason for supposing that the jews considered their God as a local divinity, in some instances more and in others less powerful than the gods of their enemies.—*Bp. Horne.*

Ver. 21—36. *The proceedings of other tribes.*

In the account of the expedition of the ephraimites against Bethel, observe their interest in the Divine favour. The Lord was with them, and would have been with the other tribes, if they had exerted their strength. The chaldee reads here, as in many other places, The Word of the Lord was their Helper, namely, Christ himself, the Captain of the Lord's hosts, now that they acted separately, as well as when they were all in one body.

Asher acquitted itself worse than any of the tribes, not only in leaving more towns than any other in the hands of the

canaanites, but in submitting to the canaanites, instead of making them tributaries; for the manner of expression intimates, that the asherites dwelt among the canaanites, as if the latter were the more numerous and the more powerful, still lords of the country, and the israelites only upon sufferance among them.

Upon the whole, it appears that the people of Israel were generally very careless, both of their duty and interest; they did not what they might have done to expel the canaanites, and make room for themselves. It was owing to slothfulness and cowardice that they would not be at the pains to complete their conquests. It was also owing to their covetousness: they were willing to let the canaanites live among them, that they might make advantage of them. They had not the dread and detestation of idolatry they ought to have had. Though the measure of their iniquity was full, they thought it would be no harm to let the canaanites live among them, and that they should be in no danger from them. The same thing that kept their fathers forty years out of Canaan, kept them now out of the full possession of it—that was, unbelief. Distrust of the power and promise of God lost them advantages, and brought them into a thousand mischiefs.

Self-indulgence, love of ease, and present worldly advantages, both spring from and foster unbelief. Thus many a sinner, who seems to have escaped Satan's bondage, is entangled again, and his last state is worse than the first. Thus many a believer who begins well is hindered—he grows negligent and afraid of the cross. His graces languish, his lusts revive, Satan plies him with suitable temptations, the world recovers its hold; he brings guilt into his conscience, anguish into his heart, discredit upon his character, and reproach upon the gospel. Though he may have sharp rebukes and salutary chastisements, and be so recovered that he doth not finally perish, yet he will have deeply to lament through his remaining days; and upon his dying bed to reflect what opportunities of glorifying God and serving the church he has irrecoverably lost. Perhaps in that solemn hour he will be distressed with perplexing doubts about the state of his own soul. Let us, then, pursue our victory against every inward foe. Let us not be content with supposed deliverance from

the dominion of sin, but aim continually to weaken and crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, striving entirely to extirpate them. We can have no fellowship with the enemies of God within us or around us but to our hurt; therefore our only wisdom is to maintain unceasing war with them.

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1—5. *The angel of the Lord rebukes the people at Bochim.*

It was the privilege of Israel, that they had not only a law sent them from Heaven, once for all, to direct them into, and keep them in the way to happiness, but that they had particular messages sent, as there was occasion, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, when they turned aside out of that way. Beside the written word they had before them, they often heard a word behind them, saying, This is the way, Isa. 30. 21. Here begins that way of God's dealing with them. When they would not hear Moses, let it be tried whether they will hear the prophets. In these verses we have a very awakening sermon that was preached to them. The language of the reproof demonstrates that it was not given by a prophet or created angel. Such messengers would not have spoken in the first person without affixing, "Thus saith the Lord." But it was the great Angel of the covenant, the Word and Son of God, who spake with Divine authority as Jehovah, as HE who brought them out of Egypt, put them in possession of Canaan, entered into covenant with them, gave them commandments, and now called them to account for their disobedience. Probably he first appeared at Gilgal, and declared the cause of his coming; from thence he came among them at or near Shiloh, where they were assembled at some solemn feast. When we attend upon God in instituted ordinances, we may expect to hear from him, and to receive his gifts at his own gates.

God here tells plainly what he had done for Israel, and what he had promised. In contempt of their covenant with God, and their confederacy with each other in that covenant, they made leagues of friendship with the idolatrous, devoted canaanites, and connived at their altars, though they stood in competition with God's. Why have ye done this?

What account can you give of this perverseness? What excuse can you offer? Those who throw off their communion with God, and have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, know not what they do now, and will have nothing to say for themselves in the day of account shortly. They must expect to suffer for this their folly. Their tolerating the canaanites among them would put a period to their victories. They will not drive them out, therefore God will not. Thus their sin was made their punishment. Thus they who indulge their lusts and corruptions, which they should mortify, forfeit the grace of God, and it is justly withdrawn from them. If we will not resist the devil, we cannot expect that God should tread him under our feet. This would involve them in continual troubles. It would, which was worst of all, expose them to constant temptation, and draw them to sin. Those deceive themselves who expect advantage by friendship with God's enemies. Those who approach sin, are justly left to themselves to fall into sin, and to perish in it. God often makes men's sin their punishment; and thorns and snares are in the way of the froward, who will walk contrary to God.

The people lifted up their voice and wept, in confession of sin, crying out against their own folly and ingratitude. They relented upon this alarm, and their hearts melted within them; they trembled at the word, and not without cause. It is a wonder sinners can ever read the bible with dry eyes. But this was not enough; we do not find that they reformed, that they went home and destroyed the remains of idolatry and idolaters among them. Many are melted under the word, that harden again, before they are cast into a new mould. However, this general weeping gave a new name to the place; they called it Bochim, Weepers, a good name for our religious assemblies to answer. Had they kept close to God and their duty, no voice but that of singing had been heard in their congregation; but by their sin and folly they had made other work for themselves, and now nothing is to be heard but the voice of weeping. The worship of God in its own nature is joy, praise, and thanksgiving; our crimes alone render weeping needful. They offered sacrifice to turn away God's wrath, and to obtain his

favour. But the history that follows shows that a general reformation did not take place. It is pleasing to see men weep for their sins; but our tears, prayers, and even amendment, cannot expiate sin—that can only be effected by the sacrifice of Christ.

Ver. 6—23. *The wickedness of the new generation after Joshua—God's anger and pity towards them.*

The first part of this history, ver. 6—9, seems to be repeated to show the occasion there was for the severe reproof given by the angel. We then have a general idea of the course of things in Israel, during the time of the judges. The people of Israel forsook the God of Israel, and gave that worship and honour to the idols of the canaanites, which was due to him alone. Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and wonder, O earth! Hath such a nation changed its God, such a God, for stocks and stones that could do neither good nor evil? Jer. 2. 11, 12. Never was there such folly, ingratitude, and perfidiousness. They forsook the only true God, yet they did not turn atheists; nor were they such fools as to say, There is no God; but “they followed other gods.” So much appeared of corrupt nature as to multiply gods, to take up with any, and to follow the fashion, not the rule, in religious worship. Israel had the honour of being a peculiar people, dignified above all others, yet so false were they to their own privileges, that they were fond of the gods of the people round about them. Baalim signifies lords, and Ashtaroth, blessed ones, both plural, when they forsook Jehovah, who is one, they had gods many, and lords many.

The God of Israel was hereby provoked to anger, and delivered them into the hand of their enemies. They made themselves as mean and miserable by forsaking God, as they would have been great and happy if they had continued faithful to him. After they forsook God, whenever they took the sword in hand, they were as sure to be beaten as before they had been sure to conquer. Their punishment answered what they had done. They served the gods of the nations round about them, even the meanest, and God made them serve the princes of the nations round about them, even the meanest. It answered what God had spoken. The hand of Heaven

was thus turned against them, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn, referring to the curse and death set before them in the covenant, with the blessing and life. Those who have found God true to his promises, may from thence infer that he will be as true to his threatenings.

The God of infinite mercy took pity on them in their distresses, though they had brought themselves into them by their own sin and folly, and wrought deliverance for them. Observe the inducement of their deliverance. It came only from God's pity and tender compassion; the reason was from within himself. It repented the Lord because of their groanings; though it is not so much the burden of sin, as the burden of affliction, that they are said to groan under. It was true they deserved to perish for ever under his curse, yet this being the day of his patience, and our probation, he does not stir up all his wrath. He might in justice have abandoned them, but he could not for pity do it. Observe also the instruments of their deliverance; God did not send angels for their rescue, but raised up judges from among themselves, as there was occasion; men to whom God gave extraordinary qualifications, and calls to that special service for which they were designed. The Lord was with the judges when he raised them up, and so they became saviours. In the days of the greatest degeneracy and distress of the church; there shall be some whom God will find or make fit to redress its grievances. And God must be acknowledged in the seasonable raising up of useful men for public service.

The degenerate israelites were not effectually and thoroughly reformed. Even while their judges were with them, and active in the work of reformation, there were those who would not hearken to their judges, but at that very time went after other gods; so mad were they upon their idols, and so obstinately bent to backslide. Idolatry is spiritual adultery; so vile and base and perfidious a thing is it, and so hardly are those reclaimed, that are addicted to it. Those who, in the times of reformation, began to amend, yet turned quickly out of the way again. They soon started from under the influence both of their fathers' good example, and of their own good education. The wicked children of godly parents do so, and will,

therefore, have a great deal to answer for. However, when the judge was dead, they looked upon the bank which checked the stream of their idolatry as removed, and then it flowed down again with so much the more fury; and in the next age they corrupted themselves more than their fathers. Thus those who have forsaken the good ways of God, which they have once known and professed, commonly grow most daring and desperate in sin, and have their hearts most hardened. God's just resolution was, still to continue the rod over them. Their sin was, sparing the canaanites; and this, in contempt and violation of the covenant God had made with them, and the commands he had given them. Their punishment was, that the canaanites were spared, and so they were beaten with their own rod. Though our Lord Jesus spoiled principalities and powers, we see not yet all things put under him; there are remains of Satan's interest in the church, as there were of the canaanites in the land; but our Joshua lives for ever, and will in the great day perfect his conquests. After Joshua's death, Israel indulged the canaanites, and grew familiar with them, and, therefore, God would not drive them out any more. If they will have such inmates as these among them, let them take them, and see what will come of it.

Men cherish and indulge their corrupt appetites and passions, and, instead of mortifying them, often make provision for them; therefore God justly leaves them to themselves, under the power of their sins, which will be their ruin. These remnants of the canaanites were left to prove Israel, whether they would keep the way of the Lord or not; not that God might know them, but that they might know themselves. It was to try whether they could resist the temptations to idolatry which the canaanites would lay before them. God has told us how deceitful and desperately wicked our hearts are, but we are not willing to believe it, until by making bold with temptation we find it true by sad experience. Also to try whether they would make good use of the vexations the remaining natives would give them, and the many troubles they would occasion them, and would thereby be convinced of sin, humbled for it, reformed, and driven to God and their duty; whether by continual alarms from them they would be kept

in awe, and made afraid of provoking God.

The more the human heart is proved, the worse it is manifested to be: while we cease not from our own doings, we can only be stubborn and rebellious. We have need to examine how matters stand with ourselves, and to pray without ceasing, that we may be rooted and grounded in love, and that Christ may indeed dwell in our hearts by faith. Let us, then, without delay, obey the gospel call, declare war against every sin, and follow after holiness to the end of our days, that we may have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1—7. *The nations left to prove Israel, by communion with whom they commit idolatry.*

As the israelites were surrounded by many warlike nations, and as they were a type of the church militant here on earth, they were not to be idle and slothful, but accustomed to hardship and conflict. This the Lord was pleased to effect by the remains of the devoted nations whom they spared when they ought to have destroyed them; they were in consequence engaged in continual contests with them. Temptations and trials detect the wickedness of the hearts of sinners; and manifest, exercise, and strengthen the graces of believers in their daily conflict with Satan, sin, and this evil world. They must live *in* this world, but they are not *of* it, and are forbidden to conform *to* it. This restriction marks the difference between the followers of Christ and mere professors in every age. The friendship of the world is more fatal than its enmity; the latter can only kill the body, but the former murders many precious souls.

When the heart is not established by grace, the descent from even the most plausible profession is easy. Uncalled for civility to ungodly people introduces to more intimate connexions—they must be a little conformable—but it is not easy to draw the line; one compliance leads to another, until a man's profession ends in apostasy. But true believers shall surely be corrected if they do thus. They shall know by experience that the friendship of the wicked and the gain of transgression will not profit here in the day of

trouble. How, then, can they profit the sinner hereafter in the day of wrath?

They joined in marriage with the canaanites. Thus they were brought to join in worship with them; they served their gods, Baalim and the groves, that is, the images that were worshipped in groves of thick trees, which were a sort of natural temples. In such unequal matches there is more reason to fear that the bad will corrupt the good, than to hope that the good will reform the bad. When they inclined to worship other gods, they forgot the Lord their God. In complaisance to their new relations they talked of Baalim and the groves, till by degrees they lost the remembrance of the true God, and forgot there was such a Being, and what obligations they lay under to him. In nothing is the corrupt memory of man more treacherous than that it is apt to forget God. Because he is out of sight, he is out of mind; and here begins all the wickedness that is in the world. They have perverted their way, for they have forgotten the Lord their God.

Ver. 8—11. *Othniel delivers Israel from Chushan-rishathaim.*

We now come to the records of the judges. The first was Othniel, by whom the story of this book is united to that of Joshua, for even in Joshua's time Othniel began to be famous; by which it appears that it was not long after Israel's settlement in Canaan before their purity began to be corrupted, and their peace, consequently, disturbed. In this short narrative of Othniel's government, we have the distress that Israel was brought into for their sin. The first that laid hands on them was Chushan-rishathaim, king of that Syria which lay between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, thence called Mesopotamia, which signifies, the midst of rivers. It is probable that this warlike prince, aiming to enlarge his dominions, invaded the two tribes on the other side Jordan that lay next him, and afterwards penetrated into the heart of their country, and put them under contribution. As his country lay at some distance, this invasion appears the more evidently the effect of God's displeasure.

They returned to God in this distress. Those who in the day of their mirth had cried to Baalim and Ashtaroth, now they are in trouble, cry to the Lord from whom they had revolted, whose justice brought

them into this trouble, and whose power and favour could alone help them out of it. Affliction makes those cry to God with importunity, who before would scarcely speak to him. God returned in mercy to them for their deliverance. Though need drove them to him, he did not therefore reject their prayers, but graciously raised up a deliverer, or saviour, as the word is. The deliverer was Othniel, one of the old stock that had seen the works of the Lord, and had himself kept his integrity, and secretly lamented the apostasy of his people, but waited for a Divine call to appear publicly for the redress of their grievances. He was far advanced in years when God raised him up to this honour, but the decays of age were no hinderance to his usefulness, when God had work for him to do. He had his commission, not of man, or by man; but the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, ver. 10. The Spirit of wisdom and courage to qualify him for the service, and a Spirit of power to excite him to it, so as to give full satisfaction that it was the will of God he should engage in it. The chaldee says, The spirit of prophecy remained on him. He first judged Israel, reproved them, called them to an account for their sins, and reformed them, and then went out to war; that was the right method. Let sin at home be conquered, that worst of enemies, then enemies abroad will be the more easily dealt with. Thus let Christ be our Judge and Lawgiver, then he will save us, and on no other terms, Isa. 33. 22. He had good success. He prevailed to break the yoke of the oppression. The happy consequence of Othniel's good services, was, that the land had rest, and some fruits of the reformation, forty years; it had been perpetual, if they had kept close to God and their duty.

Ver. 12—30. *Ehud delivers Israel from Eglon.*

Ehud is the next judge whose achievements are related in this history. When Israel sins again, God raises up a new oppressor. It was an aggravation of their wickedness, that they did evil again, after they had suffered so long for their former iniquities, promised so fair when Othniel judged them, and received so much mercy from God in their deliverance. The Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, that is, The Lord had formed Eglon of a stout

and valiant spirit, had raised him to considerable prosperity as a prince, and afforded him success in his enterprise against the israelites. The israelites did ill, and the moabites did worse; yet because God punishes the sins of his own people in this world, that, the flesh being destroyed, the spirit may be saved, Israel is weakened, and Moab strengthened against them. The former servitude lasted but eight years, this eighteen; for if lesser troubles do not do the work, God will send greater.

When Israel prays again, God raises up a new deliverer, his name Ehud. He was a benjamite. The city of palm trees lay within the lot of this tribe, by which, it is probable, they suffered the most, and therefore stirred first to shake off the yoke. See how quickly the israelites lost that by their own sin, which they had gained by miracles of Divine mercy. It is supposed by chronologers, that the israelites' war with Benjamin for the wickedness of Gibeah, by which that whole tribe was reduced to six hundred men, happened before this, so that we may well think that tribe to be now the weakest of all the tribes, yet out of it God raised up this deliverer, to manifest his own power in ordaining strength out of weakness. He saved the oppressed by destroying the oppressors, when the measure of their iniquity was full, and the set time to favour Israel was come. He put to death Eglon the king of Moab; put him to death, not murdered or assassinated him; but as a judge, or minister of Divine justice, executed the judgments of God upon him as an implacable enemy to God and Israel.

The present of Ehud is called *mincha* in the original, which is the word used in the law for the offerings that were presented to God, to obtain his favour; these the children of Israel had not offered in their season, to the God that loved them; and now, to punish them for their neglect, they are laid under a necessity of bringing their offerings to a heathen prince that hated them. Some have supposed that Ehud could use both hands equally well; but if he were unable to use his right hand, Eglon would be the less likely to suspect him, and he would be an instrument no less suitable for the Lord to work by. The israelites had sent their tribute by him, under the name of a present; and the Lord, who raised him up to

deliver Israel, doubtless as King of Israel, directed him to take this opportunity of executing the Divine vengeance on the tyrant. Eglon had usurped the Lord's throne, and became his rival. But Ehud's conduct cannot possibly be drawn into precedent, or authorize the assassination of any one, however tyrannical or persecuting, unless a man were called to act by the same *evident* commission from the God of heaven. The law of being subject to principalities and powers in all things lawful, is the rule of our conduct.

Ehud returned from the quarries by Gilgal, from "the graven images" which were at Gilgal; set up perhaps by the moabites in contempt of the God of Israel, with the twelve stones which Joshua had set up there. Some suggest that the sight of these idols stirred up in him such indignation against the king of Moab, as put him on the execution of that design.

Ehud demands Eglon's attention to a message from God, and that message was a dagger. God sends to us by the judgments of his hand, as well as by the judgments of his mouth. Eglon pays respect to a message from God. Though a king, though a heathen king, though rich and powerful, though now tyrannizing over the people of God, though a fat, unwieldy man that could not easily rise, nor stand long, though in private, and what he did not under observation, yet, when he expected to receive orders from Heaven, he rose out of his seat; whether it was low and easy, or whether it was high and stately, he quitted it, and stood up when God was about to speak to him, thereby owning God his Superior. This shames the irreverence of many who are called christians, and who yet, when a message from God is delivered to them, often show by marks of carelessness, how little they regard it. Ehud, in calling what he had to do, a message from God, plainly avouches a Divine commission for it; and God's inclining Eglon to stand up confirmed the commission, and made the execution more easy. His extreme fatness made him unable to resist, or to help himself; probably it was the effect of his luxury and excess; and when the fat closed up the blade, God would by that circumstance show how those that pamper the body, prepare for their own misery. However, it was an emblem of his carnal security and senselessness. Now let us *again* observe that this act of Ehud's may

justify itself, because he had special direction from God for it, and it was agreeable to the usual method, which, under that dispensation, God took to avenge his people of their enemies, and to manifest to the world his own justice. But it will by no means justify any now in doing the like. No such commissions are now given, and to pretend to them is to blaspheme God, and make him patronize the worst villanies. Christ bade Peter sheathe the sword, we find not that he bade him draw it again.

Notice more particularly Ehud's address to Eglon.—What message from God but a message of vengeance can a proud rebel expect? Such a message is evidently contained in the word of God, though we are not *now* commissioned or allowed to be the executioners of it; yet his ministers are boldly to declare it, without fearing the frown or respecting the persons of sinners. But blessed be God, they have also another message to deliver, a message of mercy and of free salvation; the message of vengeance belongs only to those who neglect the offers of grace. With reverent attention let us hear this message, in humble faith let us seek for and accept this great salvation. Let us beg of God to give us repentance, and to enable us to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. Let us enlist under the Redeemer's banner, put on his armour, and declare determined war against his and our enemies. He hath begun our triumphs by his victory over the powers of darkness upon the cross; and over the king of terrors by his resurrection. The trumpet of his gospel calls us to follow after him; obeying that summons, the day will be ours, we shall conquer, triumph, and reign with him in glory for evermore.

The heroic executioner of Divine vengeance, with such a presence of mind, as discovered no consciousness of guilt, but strong confidence in the Divine protection, made his escape to Seirath, a thick wood; so some say. It is not said any where in this story, what was the place where Eglon lived; but it is supposed that Eglon had left his own country of Moab, on the other side Jordan, and made his principal residence at this time in the city of palm trees, within the land of Canaan, a richer country than his own, and that there he was slain, and then the quarries by Gilgal were not far off from him. There where he had settled him-

self, and thought he had sufficiently fortified himself to lord it over the people of God, there he was cut off. Ehud having slain the king of Moab, effectually shook off the yoke of oppression. He raised an army immediately in mount Ephraim, and headed them himself. The trumpet he blew was indeed a jubilee trumpet, proclaiming liberty; and a joyful sound to the oppressed israelites. As one that did all this in faith, he took encouragement himself, and gave encouragement to his soldiers, from the power of God engaged for them. There escaped not a man of all the king of Moab's forces. Neither their strength nor their courage stood them in any stead, when the set time was come for God to deliver them into the hand of Israel. The consequence of this victory was, that the country was cleared of these oppressors, and the land had rest eighty years. We may hope there was likewise a reformation among them, and a check given to idolatry, by the influence of Ehud, which continued a good part of this time. It was a great while for the land to rest, fourscore years; yet what is that to the saints' everlasting rest in the heavenly Canaan?

18. It is customary in the east for presents to be offered with much parade by many attendants, who are dismissed when a confidential message is to be delivered.

Ver. 31. *Shamgar delivers and judges Israel.*

When it was said the land had rest eighty years, some think it is meant chiefly of that part of the land which lay eastward on the banks of Jordan, which had been oppressed by the moabites; it seems by this passage here, that the other side of the country which lay south-west, was at that time infested by the philistines, against whom Shamgar made head. Deborah afterwards related in her song, that in the days of Shamgar the highways were unoccupied, that part of the country which lay next to the philistines was so infested with plunderers, that people could not travel the roads in safety, but were in danger of being set upon and robbed; nor durst they dwell in the unguarded villages, but were forced to take shelter in the fortified cities.

God raised up Shamgar to deliver them, as it appears, while Ehud was yet living. So inconsiderable were these enemies for number, that it seems the killing six hundred of them amounted to a deliverance of Israel, and so many

Shamgar slew with an ox-goad, or, as some read it, a plough-share. It is probable that he was himself following the plough, when the philistines made an inroad, and God put it into his heart to oppose them; having neither sword nor spear, he took the instrument next at hand, and with that killed six hundred men, and came off unhurt. God can make those eminently serviceable to his glory and his church's good, whose extraction, education, and employment are mean and obscure. He that has the residue of the Spirit, could, when he pleased, make ploughmen judges and generals, and fishermen apostles. It is no matter what the weapon is, if God direct and strengthen the arm. An ox-goad, when God pleases, shall do more than Goliath's sword. Sometimes he chooses to work by unlikely means, that the excellency of the power may appear to be of God.

31. The goads used in the east for driving oxen are of considerable size. Maundrell describes those in Syria as eight feet long, and six inches round where thickest, with a small spade at one end, and a sharp point at the other. Such an instrument would be a formidable weapon.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1—3. *Israel again revolts from God, and is oppressed by Jabin, king of Canaan.*

Israel again did evil. See in this the strength of corruption which hurries men into sin, notwithstanding the most frequent instances of its fatal consequences. The bent to backslide is very difficult to be restrained. See also the common ill effects of a long peace. The land had rest eighty years, which should have confirmed them in their religion; but on the contrary, it made them secure and wanton, and indulgent of those lusts which the worship of the false gods was calculated to gratify. Thus the prosperity of fools destroys them. They did evil, because Ehud was dead. So it may be read. When he was gone, they revolted, fearing him more than God. When Israel forsook God, he forsook them; then they became an easy prey to every spoiler. Those who throw themselves out of God's service, throw themselves out of his protection. Jabin reigned in Hazor, as another of the same name, perhaps his ancestor, had done before him, whom Joshua routed and slew, and burnt his city, Josh. 11. 1—10. But it seems, in process of time, the city was rebuilt, the power re-

gained, the loss retrieved, and the king of Hazor became able to tyrannize over Israel, who by sin had lost their advantage against the canaanites. The remains of those nations having in great numbers resorted there, it was called Harosheth of the gentiles, or nations. This servitude was longer than either of the former, and much more grievous. Jabin, and his general Sisera, mightily oppressed Israel. This enemy was nearer than any of the former, in their borders, and by that means had the more opportunity to do them mischief. Israel cried unto the Lord, when distress drove them to him, and they saw no other way of relief. Those who slight God in their prosperity, will find themselves under a necessity of seeking him when they are in trouble.

Ver. 4—9. *Deborah judges Israel—She concerts their deliverance with Barak.*

Concerning Deborah we are here told, that she was intimately acquainted with God. She was a prophetess; one instructed in Divine knowledge by the immediate inspiration of the Spirit of God, and had gifts of wisdom she had not attained to in an ordinary way. She was entirely devoted to the service of Israel. She judged Israel at the time Jabin oppressed them. She judged as a prophetess, and as God's mouth to them, correcting abuses, and redressing grievances, especially those which related to the worship of God. The children of Israel came to her from all parts for judgment. When the children of Israel came to her for judgment, with her they found salvation. So those who seek God for grace, shall have grace and peace, grace and comfort, grace and glory.

By God's direction, she orders Barak to raise an army, and engage Jabin's forces, that were under Sisera's command. She directs him to raise ten thousand men; and let him not fear those will be too few, when God has said, he will by them save Israel. He should raise them only out of his own tribe, and that of Zebulun next adjoining; those two should furnish a sufficient army, he need not go further. She assures him, the matter should be determined by one pitched battle, and in fixing the very place to which Sisera would draw his army, she gave him a sign, which might help to confirm his faith when he came to engage. At Barak's request she promised to go with

him to the field of battle. Barak insists much upon the necessity of her presence. Some make this the language of a weak faith; he could not take her word, unless he had her with him. It seems rather to arise from a conviction of the necessity of God's presence and continual conduct, a pledge and earnest of which he would reckon Deborah's presence to be; therefore begged thus earnestly for it. Deborah promised to go with him. No toil nor peril shall discourage her from doing the utmost that becomes her to do for the service of her country. She would not send him where she would not go herself. Those who in God's name call others to their duty, should be ready to assist them in it. But though she agrees to go with Barak, she tells him the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hands of a woman: that is, The world would ascribe the victory to the hand of Deborah; this he might himself foresee. And God would complete the victory by the hand of Jael; which would be some eclipse to his glory. But Barak values the satisfaction of his mind, and the good success of his enterprise, more than mere honour; and will not drop his request.

Ver. 10—16. *The host of Sisera defeated.*

Though the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were chiefly depended on; yet it appears by Deborah's song, that some came from other tribes, Manasseh and Issachar; and more were expected who came not, from Reuben, Dan, and Asher, ch. 5. 14—17. Sisera's confidence was chiefly in his chariots; particular notice is taken of them, nine hundred chariots of iron, which, with the scythes fastened to their axle-trees, when they were driven into an army of foot, did terrible execution: so ingenious have men been in inventing methods of destroying one another, to gratify the lusts from which come wars and fightings.

Deborah animated Barak to make a descent upon Sisera, assuring him that this was the day marked out in the Divine counsels for his defeat. Now that the enemies appear most threatening, they are ripe for ruin. The thing is as sure to be done, as if done already. She says, The Lord hath delivered Sisera into thy hand. In every undertaking it is good to be satisfied that God goes before us, that we are in the way of our duty, and under his direction. And if we have ground to hope that God goes

before us, we ought to go on with courage and cheerfulness. Be not dismayed at the difficulties thou meetest with in resisting Satan, in serving God, or suffering for him; for is not the Lord gone out before thee? Follow him then fully.

Barak, in obedience to Deborah's orders, went down into the valley, though upon the plain the iron chariots would have the more advantage against him, quitting his fastnesses upon the mountain in dependence upon the Divine power; for in vain is salvation hoped for from hills and mountains; in the Lord alone is the salvation of his people, Jer. 3. 23. He was not deceived in his confidence. The Lord discomfited Sisera. It was not so much the bold and surprising alarm Barak gave their camp that dispirited and dispersed them, but God's terror seized their spirits, and put them into confusion. They became an easy prey to the army of Israel. Barak improved his advantage with unwearied diligence, and spared none whom God had delivered into his hand to be destroyed. There was not a man left. When God goes before us in our spiritual conflicts, we must bestir ourselves; and when by his grace he gives us some success against the enemies of our souls, we must improve it by watchfulness and resolution, and carry on the holy war with vigour.

11. The account of the removal of Heber, one of the families of the kenites, out of the wilderness of Judah, in the south, where those families had fixed themselves, ch. 1. 16, into the northern country, comes in for the sake of what was to follow concerning the exploit of Jael, who was of that family.—*Henry.*

12. Mount Tabor is situated on one side of the great plain of Esdraelon, about six miles from Nazareth. It stands by itself, quite detached from any other mountain. It is about a mile in height: the sides rugged and steep, but clothed with trees and underwood. On the summit is an oval plain about a quarter of a mile in length. The prospects from thence are very beautiful and extensive. The plain of Esdraelon is about fifteen miles square, and the most fertile district in Canaan. It has been the scene of many remarkable contests since the time of Barak. Here Josiah fought against Pharaoh-necho, 2 Kings 23. 29. Here Josephus erected fortifications. See note, 2 Kings 23.

Ver. 17—24. *Sisera put to death by Jael.*

Sisera quitted his chariot, and fled away on foot that he might escape notice. For the same purpose he took refuge in the obscure tent of Heber, from whose peaceable family, not being israelites, he apprehended no danger. His chariots had been his pride and his confidence; justly

therefore is he thus made ashamed of his confidence, and forced to quit it, and thinks himself most safe and easy, when he is clear of his chariot. Thus are they disappointed who rest on the creature; like a broken reed, it not only breaks under them, but runs into their hand, and pierces them with many sorrows. The idol may quickly become a burden, Isa. 46. 1, what we were sick *for*, God can make us sick *of*.

The mean and solitary way, in which the kenites lived, perhaps, Sisera formerly despised and ridiculed, and the more, because religion was kept up among them; yet now he is glad to shelter himself in one of these tents. He chose the wife's tent or apartment, probably because less suspected. Jael welcomed him. It is probable that she really intended kindness to Sisera, when she invited him into the tent, and showed him all the hospitality which it afforded, but by a Divine impulse she was afterwards led to consider him as the determined enemy of the Lord and of his people, and to avail herself of that opportunity to destroy him. Jael gave him shelter and refreshment, but did not promise Sisera that she would deny his being there. A sad deviation from simplicity has become customary among us—the instructing servants to prevaricate, (a stronger term might be applied,) merely to prevent visitants when unwelcome! Surely some more manly, candid, and christian method might be used. It should be considered whether they who require servants thus to disregard truth do not teach them an evil lesson against themselves. When Sisera lay fast asleep, Jael drove a tent nail through his temples; so fastened his head to the ground, and killed him. All our connexions with God's enemies must be broken off, if we would have the Lord for our God, and his people for our people.

The instrument of this execution was a nail of the tent, that is, one of the great pins with which the tent, or the cords of it were fastened. They often removed their tents; she had been used to drive these nails, and knew how to do it. He that had thought to have destroyed Israel with his many iron chariots, is himself destroyed with one iron nail! Thus do the weak things of the world confound the mighty. Let not the strong man glory in his strength; for when he sleeps, where is it? He is weak, and he can do

nothing; a child may insult him then, and steal his life from him: and yet if he sleep not, he is soon spent and weary, and can do nothing. Sisera dies by the hand of a woman. This added to the shame of his death before men.

As courage and faith are the gifts of God, we may expect that he will so dispense them as shall conduce to his own glory; and will show the strongest that they need to be encouraged, and on some occasions are surpassed by their weaker brethren.

Israel is delivered out of the hands of Jabin king of Canaan. They not only shook off his yoke by this day's victory, but afterwards prosecuted the war against him, till they destroyed him, he and his nation being by the Divine appointment devoted to ruin, and not to be spared. The israelites having suffered for not doing it before, now indulge them no longer. To show mercy to them was as contrary to their own interest as to God's command. The children of Israel had prevented a great deal of mischief, if they had sooner destroyed these canaanites, as God had both commanded and enabled them; but better be wise late, and buy wisdom by experience, than never be wise.

20. Eastern travellers state, that no stranger ever dares to come into the woman's part of an arab tent, unless introduced.

21. Large wooden pegs, sharp at the end, and with an iron point, are used by the arabs to fasten their tents. The Divine warrant, in this especial case, justified the conduct of Jael, as *Bp. Hall* expresses it, He that puts this instinct into her heart, also puts strength into her hand.

CHAPTER V.

THE SONG OF DEBORAH AND BARAK.

Ver. 1—5. *Praise and glory ascribed to God.*

Deborah herself penned this song, as appears by ver. 7. And the first words should be rendered, Then she sang, even Deborah. She used her gifts as a prophetess in composing the song, and the strain throughout is very fine and lofty, the images lively, the expressions elegant; an admirable mixture there is in it of sweetness and majesty. No poetry is comparable to the sacred poetry.

No time should be lost in returning thanks to the Lord for his mercies; for our praises are most acceptable, pleasant, and profitable, when they flow from a full heart, before the tide of affection has begun to subside. By this method of

celebrating the wonderful works of God, love and gratitude would be more excited and more deeply fixed in the hearts of believers—the events would be more known and longer remembered than by a prose narration. Whatever Deborah, Barak, or the army had done, the Lord must have all the praise. The will, the power, and the success, were all from him. The israelites were the more especially required to praise the Lord for avenging them upon their oppressors, as they had brought on their miseries by their own crimes. They were also to praise him for the grace he gave to Israel's friends; when the people willingly offered themselves to serve in this war. God is to have the glory of all the good offices at any time done us; and the more willingly they are done, the more is to be observed of that grace, which gives both to will and to do.

The kings of the surrounding nations were contriving the ruin of the israelites. This song was likely to be heard by them through successive generations. The prophetess calls on them to hear what God had wrought for Israel, and to take warning not to meddle to their hurt. She reminds them that praise and glory belong to the Lord, not to them or their idols. The extraordinary displays of Divine Majesty their fathers had witnessed at mount Sinai are described in very poetical language, and compared with the recent interposition of the Lord for Israel. The presence of God had thrown all nature into convulsions—the thunderings and lightnings were attended by impetuous showers of rain; mount Sinai was in such agitation that it seemed to be melted before the Lord.

This beautiful, inspired poem is in eight parts or stanzas: 1. Thanksgiving to the Lord. 2. Describes what passed at Sinai and in the wilderness. 3. The wickedness and sufferings of the israelites. 4. Their deliverance. 5. Censures on the tribes that did not come forward. 6. The defeat of the canaanites. 7. The praises, &c. of Jael. 8. The expectations and disappointments of the mother of Sisera.

Ver. 6—11. *The distress and deliverance of Israel.*

Deborah describes the distressed state of Israel under the tyranny of Jabin, that the greatness of their trouble might make their salvation appear the more illustrious, and the more gracious. From the days of Shamgar, who did something toward the deliverance of Israel from the philistines, to the day in which Jael so

signalized herself, the country has been in a manner desolate. 1. No trade. For want of soldiers to protect men in their business from the enemy, and for want of magistrates to restrain and punish thieves and robbers among themselves, very desperate spirits, who, having no employment, took to rob, all commerce ceased, and the high-ways were unoccupied. 2. No travelling. In times when there was order, the travellers might be safe in the open roads, and the robbers were forced to lurk in the byways; now, on the contrary, the honest travellers were obliged to walk through by-ways in continual fright. 3. No tillage. The fields must needs be laid waste and unoccupied, when the inhabitants of the villages ceased from their employment, quitted their houses which were continually attacked and plundered, and were obliged to take shelter for themselves and their families in walled and fenced cities, where they were in danger of perishing through famine. 4. No administration of justice. There was war in the gates where their courts were kept, ver. 8. So that it was not till this salvation was wrought, that the people of the Lord durst go down to the gates, ver. 11. The continual incursions of the enemy deprived the magistrates of the dignity, and the people of the benefit of their government. No peace to him that went out, or to him that came in. The gates through which they passed and repassed were infested by the enemy; the places of drawing water were alarmed by the archers. They had neither arms nor spirit to help themselves with, nor a shield nor spear seen among forty thousand.

She shows in one word what brought all this misery upon them. It was their idolatry that provoked God to give them into the hands of their enemies. "They chose new gods," with new names. But under all these images, Satan was worshipped. Their fathers, when put to their choice, chose the Lord for their God, Josh. 24. 21; but the following generations would not abide by that choice; they must have gods of their own choosing. She notices God's great goodness to Israel, in raising up such as should redress their grievances. Herself first. She employed her authority for the real good of the people, with the tender, disinterested care a mother shows to her beloved children. Kings should

be fathers of their people, employing all their time and abilities to render them happy. Deborah was a mother to Israel in reality, especially by diligently promoting the salvation of their souls. Under her there were other governors of Israel, ver. 9, and no doubt, the example of the governors influenced the people, making them willing to offer themselves. Of these governors she says, My heart is toward them, that is, I truly love and honour them. Those are worthy of double honour, who recede voluntarily from the demands of their honour in order to serve God and his church. She calls upon those who had a particular share in the advantages of this great salvation, to offer up particular thanks to God for it; Ye that ride on white asses. Horses were little used in that country; their asses were larger and more powerful animals than ours. Persons of quality were distinguished by the colour of the asses they rode on. Notice is taken of Abdon's sons and grandsons riding on ass-colts, as indicating them to be men of distinction, Judg. 12. 14.

Let such as are restored, not only to their liberty as other israelites, but to their dignity, speak God's praises. Let them that sit in judgment be thankful that the sword of judgment is not struck out of their hand by the sword of war. Let them that walk by the way, and meet with none there to make them afraid, speak to themselves in pious meditations, and to their fellow-travellers in religious discourses, of the goodness of God in ridding the roads of the robbers that had so long infested them. Let them that draw water in peace, and have not their wells taken from them, or stopped up, nor are in danger of being caught by the enemy when they go forth to draw there, let them rehearse the acts of the Lord—not Deborah's acts, or Barak's, but the Lord's; taking notice of his hand making peace in our borders, and creating a defence upon all the glory. This is the Lord's doing. Observe in these acts of his, justice executed on his daring enemies. They are the righteous acts of the Lord. In times of persecution, God's ordinances, those wells of salvation, whence the waters of life are drawn, cannot be approached, but at the hazard of the lives of those who attend upon them. At all times Satan will endeavour to hinder the believer from drawing near to the

throne of grace. Notice God's kindness to his trembling people, the inhabitants of the villages, who lay most open to the enemy, had suffered most, and were most in danger. It is the glory of God to protect those who are most exposed, and to help the weakest. Let us all take notice of the benefit we in particular have from the public peace and tranquillity, the inhabitants of the villages especially, and give God the praise of it.

10. It is probable, at least in the early ages of the settlement of the jews in Canaan, that their judges rode on white asses, by way of distinction, as the mollahs, or men of law, do now in Persia. —*T. H. Horne.* Jowett met the head of a family returning from pilgrimage to Mecca thus mounted, as a mark of honour.

11. It is very common in the east for robbers to lurk about the watering places, knowing that travellers must stop there, and that, probably, they will be found off their guard. Also the inhabitants of towns, in general, have to supply themselves with water from springs at some distance.

Ver. 12—23. *Some commended, others censured.*

The governors and people having been reminded to praise the Lord, Deborah called upon her own soul, or instructed the people to call upon her, to be in earnest in this most reasonable and delightful employment. He that will set the hearts of other men on fire with the love of Christ, must himself burn with love. Praising God is work we should awake to, and awake ourselves unto. Barak, as a general, must do it by a triumph. Lead thy captivity captive. Not as if it should be any pleasure to him to trample upon his fellow-creatures, but thus he must give glory to God, and serve him whose purpose it is to look upon those that are proud, and to abase them.

Multitudes of the israelites had been slain and driven into other countries; yet the Lord made the remnant of them, under the government of a woman, to have dominion over their strongest enemies. Thus she gives good reason for this praise and triumph. As long as any of God's Israel remain, and a remnant God will have in the worst of times, there is hope, be it ever so small a remnant; for God can make him that remains, though but one single person, triumph over the most proud and potent. Deborah was of the weaker sex, and yet the Lord, who is himself higher than the highest, authorized her to rule over the mighty men of Israel, who willingly submitted to her conduct, and enabled her to triumph over the mighty men of Canaan.

She notices who fought against Israel, who fought for them, and who stood neuter. Who fought *against* them. Amalek was in league with Jabin, and sent him assistance, or endeavoured to do it. Ephraim is here said to act against Amalek, probably cutting off some of the amalekites, upon their march to join Sisera. Amalek had helped Moab to oppress Israel, ch. 3. 13, and now had helped Jabin; they were inveterate enemies to God's people, whose hand had always been against the throne of the Lord, Exod. 17. 16, therefore the more dangerous. Other kings of Canaan came and fought, ver. 19. They took no gain of money, they were volunteers and hearty in the cause against Israel: they desired not the riches of silver, so says the chaldee, but only the satisfaction of helping to ruin Israel. Acting upon this principle, they were the more formidable, and would be the more cruel.

Who fought *for* them. The several tribes that assisted in this great exploit are here spoken of with honour; for though God is chiefly to be glorified, instruments must have their due praise for the encouragement of others; but after all, it was the Lord that turned the scale.

The stars in their courses, according to the order and direction of Him who is the great Lord of their hosts, fought against Sisera, by their influences; or by causing the storms of hail and thunder, which contributed much to the rout of Sisera's army. The chaldee reads it, From heaven, from the place where the stars go forth, war was waged against Sisera; that is, the power of the God of heaven was engaged against him, making use of the ministration of the angels of heaven. Some way or other, the heavenly bodies, not arrested, as when the sun stood still at Joshua's word, but going on in their courses, fought against Sisera. Those whom God is an enemy to, the whole creation is at war with. Perhaps the lightning frightened the horses, so that they pranced till their hoofs were broken, and overturned the chariots of iron which they drew, or turned them back upon their owners.

The river of Kishon fought against their enemies. It swept away abundance of those who hoped to make their escape through it. Ordinarily it was but a shallow river, yet now, probably, by the great rain that fell, it was so swelled, and the

stream so deep and strong, that those who attempted to pass, were drowned.

Deborah's own soul fought against them; she speaks with holy exultation, ver. 21, O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength. She did so by exciting others to do it, and assisting them, which she did with all her heart; as also by her prayers. As Moses conquered Amalek by lifting up his hand, so Deborah vanquished Sisera by lifting up her heart. And when the soul is employed in holy exercises, and heart-work is made of them, through the grace of God, the strength of our spiritual enemies will be trodden down, and will fall before us.

In this great engagement she observes who *stood neuter*, and did not side with Israel, as might have been expected. No mention is made of Judah or Simeon; they being remote from the scene of action, had not an opportunity to appear, and it was not expected from them; but upon those who lay near, and yet would not venture, indelible disgrace is put. Reuben basely declined the service. Two things hindered them. 1. Their divisions. For the divisions of Reuben, or in these divisions, there were great thoughts, impressions, and searchings of heart. Some unhappy contests in their tribe kept them from uniting together, and with their brethren, for the common good; or they were divided in their opinion of this war from the rest of the tribes, blamed those who engaged in it, and did themselves decline it; this occasioned great searchings of heart among the rest. It grieves us to see our mother's children angry with us for doing our duty, and looking strange upon us when we most need their friendship and assistance. 2. Their business in the world. Reuben abode among the sheep-folds, a safer place than the camp, pretending they could not conveniently leave the sheep they tended. Thus many are kept from doing their duty by the fear of trouble, the love of ease, and an inordinate affection to their worldly business and advantage. Narrow, selfish spirits care not what becomes of the interests of God's church, so they can but get, keep, and save money. All seek their own, Phil. 2. 21.

Dan and Asher did the same. These two lay on the sea-coast; but Zebulun also was a haven of ships, a sea-faring tribe, yet was active in this expedition. There is no excuse we make to shift off

duty, but what some or other have broken through and set aside, whose courage and resolution will rise up against us and shame us. Asher pretended he must stay at home to repair the breaches which the sea had made upon his land; or he abode in his creeks, or small havens, where his trading vessels lay. A little will serve those for a pretence to stay at home, who have no mind to engage in necessary services, because there is difficulty and danger in them.

Meroz was probably a city near to the field of battle, so that their refusal to assist was inexcusable. Perhaps it arose from secret favour to the canaanites. The Lord did not want their help against the mightiest of his enemies; but their conduct showed unbelief, and exposed them to this terrible curse. Deborah did not pronounce it of herself, but the Angel of the Lord, the Captain of the Lord's host, Josh. 5. 14, commanded her to pronounce it. We are not to pronounce curses upon any, but we cannot remain neuter in the contest betwixt the Lord and his enemies; and if we do not *actively* endeavour to promote his cause in this wicked world according to our ability, we shall fall under the curse He hath pronounced against the workers of iniquity. Though he needs no human help, yet he is pleased to employ and accept the services of those who, in their several stations, improve their talents to advance his cause. He requires every man to do so, and will call to a severe account all who neglect, or shift off his service.

There are considerable difficulties respecting what is here said of the tribes of Israel. *Lightfoot* gives the following summary of ver. 13 to 23; "That now the Lord had given the remnant of his people dominion over the great ones that ruled them before. Joshua of Ephraim had been the root of such victories against Amalek; and Ehud lately against Amalek, Moab, and Ammon. And now the Lord had so stirred up the hearts of the people to fight the Lord's battles, that even men of the best rank, and of the most unmartial profession, were yet very ready to jeopard themselves in such a quarrel. That the lawyers of Machir, or half of Gilead, came, though they lay beyond Jordan, and the scribes of Zebulun, and princes of Issachar. But Reuben, and the other half of Gilead on the other side of Jordan, and Dan, not very far from the place of battle, stayed at home, and preferred their private employments before the public good. That the Lord was seen in the battle, by storms and tempests from heaven, as if the stars themselves fought against them—He forewarned their destruction, as he had done for Joshua and Israel in the valley of Gibeon. That 'Kishon, a river of their antiquities,' a water of much idolatry among them in ancient time, had now proved their destroyer,

and had swept away them that vainly, impiously, and foolishly had adored it."

17. Manasseh had two sons, Machir and Jair, who possessed Gilead with Reuben and Gad, see Numb. 32. The gileadites which came of Machir helped Deborah, ver. 14, therefore it cannot be they who are here reproved, but those of Jair.—*Rogers*. Or it may be put as an interrogation, Did Gilead abide beyond Jordan? in contrast with the reubenites.—See *Poole*.

21. In the east, and in mountainous countries generally, after a heavy storm, the small brooks among the hills which had previously been almost dry, swell into torrents, and sweep away every thing in their course, frequently not allowing those who may be resting on the banks sufficient warning to escape. Maundrell, visiting the Kishon in 1697, found that the waters were at that time low and inconsiderable, but observed the traces of many torrents flowing into it from the mountains, which, he says, "must make it swell exceedingly upon sudden rains, as doubtless it actually did at the destruction of Sisera's hosts."

That ancient river. A river anciently famous for some exploits performed there.—*Poole*.

22. The horses in the east seldom are shod.

Ver. 24—31. *Sisera slain by Jael—The disappointed expectations of Sisera's mother*.

The people of Meroz, though israelites, feared or favoured the canaanites more than they dreaded the power, or desired the favour of God; therefore they were accursed with the canaanites. Jael, though not an israelite, out of faith and love to the cause of God, preferred the friendship of his people to that of their enemies, and was joined with them in the blessing. She had a special blessing. Blessed shall she be above women in the tent. Those whose lot is cast in the tent, in a low and narrow sphere, if they serve God in that according to their capacity, shall not lose their reward. Jael in the tent wins as rich a blessing as Barak in the field.

The mother of Sisera impatiently looked for his return, and wondered at the long delay, not in the least fearing his success in so unequal a contest as this appeared to her. Her ladies, *in their wisdom*, (it is spoken ironically,) suggested that Sisera only waited to divide the spoil he had taken, and she as *wisely* pleased her mind with the imagination. Let us take heed of indulging eager desires toward any temporal good thing, particularly toward that which cherishes vain-glory, for that was what she here doted on. Eagerness and impatience in our desires do us much injury, and make it intolerable to us to be crossed. But toward the second coming of Jesus Christ, and the glories of that day, we should thus stand affected, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly, for here we cannot be disappointed. What a picture does she present of an ungodly and

sensual heart! How shameful these wishes of an aged mother for her son!

How childishly they please themselves with the hope of seeing Sisera himself in a gaudy mantle of divers colours of needlework, plundered from some israelite! Thus apt are we to deceive ourselves with great expectations, and confident hopes of honour, and pleasure, and wealth in this world, by which we prepare for ourselves the shame and grief of a disappointment. And thus does God often bring ruin on his enemies when they are most elevated.

Deborah concludes with a prayer to God for the destruction of all his foes, and for the exaltation and comfort of all his friends. Let those who love God, and heartily wish well to his kingdom among men, be as the sun when he goeth forth in his strength. Let them shine as bright, appear as glorious in the eyes of the world, cast such benign influences, be as much out of the reach of their enemies, who curse the rising sun because it scorches them; let them rejoice as a strong man to run a race, Psa. 19. 5. Let them, as burning and shining lights in their places, dispel the mists of darkness, and shine with more and more lustre and power unto the perfect day, Prov. 4. 18. Such shall be the honour, and such the joy of all who love God in sincerity, and they shall shine for ever as the sun in the firmament of our Father.

In this state of infirmity, believers will pity and pray for the wicked, and use all their influence to persuade them to pity themselves, to forsake their evil ways, that they may live. But in the great and terrible day, when the wicked shall be turned into hell, the righteous will be so perfectly impressed with the justice and holiness of the sentence of condemnation, that like Deborah and Barak they will be ready to exclaim, So let thine enemies perish, O Lord.—(51.)

The victory celebrated with this song was of such happy consequence to Israel, that the land had rest forty years. Well it had been, if, when the churches and the tribes had rest, they had been edified, and had walked in the fear of the Lord. The tendency of fallen nature is to apostasy from God. It is so strong that no means can of themselves prevent its effect. When Divine grace is withheld, man naturally does evil. The scriptures teach us this humiliating truth, in order that all the glory of every thing good in

man may be given to the Lord; that the sinner may depend entirely upon his gracious assistance; that we may all be reminded that in our flesh dwelleth no good thing.

25. Or, butter milk, which is very refreshing.

26. Or, She smote his head.

CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1—6. *Israel does evil, and is oppressed by the midianites.*

Nothing that occurred in the quiet and peaceable times of Israel is recorded. The forty years' rest after the conquest of Jabin is passed over in silence; and here begins the story of another distress, and another deliverance by Gideon, the fourth of the judges. Israel's sin was renewed, and Israel's troubles were repeated. This would follow of course. Let all that sin expect to suffer; with the froward God will show himself froward, Psa. 18. 26, and will walk contrary to those that walk contrary to him, Lev. 26. 21, 24. As to this trouble, it arose from a despicable enemy, God delivered them into the hand of Midian, not Midian in the south where Jethro lived, but Midian in the east that joined to Moab, Numb. 22. 4. They were a people that Israel had formerly subdued, and in a manner destroyed: see Numb. 31. 7. But the meanest creature will serve to chastise those who make the great Creator their enemy. And sinful Israel, being separated by sin from God, had not spirit to make head against Midian.

The israelites imprisoned themselves in dens and caves; it was the effect of a guilty conscience, which made them tremble at the shaking of a leaf, and the just punishment of their apostasy from God, who thus fought against them with those very terrors with which he would otherwise have fought for them. Sin dispirits men. The day will come when even chief captains and mighty men will call in vain to rocks and mountains to hide them.

The israelites were greatly impoverished. The invaders left no sustenance for Israel, except what was privately taken by the rightful owners into the caves. Here we may see the justice of God in the punishment of their sin. They had neglected to honour God with their substance, and had prepared that for Baal with which God should have been served, now God justly sends an enemy to take it away in the season thereof, Hos. 2. 8, 9.

See also the consequence of God's departure from a people; when he leaves them all good goes, and all mischiefs break in. When Israel kept in with God, they reaped what others sowed, Josh. 24. 13; Psa. 105. 44; but now that God had forsaken them, others reaped what they sowed. Let us take occasion from this, to bless God for national peace and tranquillity, that we eat the labour of our hands. But when plenty is abused in sensuality, it is a merciful chastisement to be pinched with want, and reminded that we have provoked the Lord. At last, all other succours failing, Israel cried unto the Lord. When God judges, he will overcome; and sinners shall be made either to bend or break before him.

1. It is not said in Numb. 31. 7—12, that all the midianites were extirpated.—*T. H. Horne.*

2, 4. Many caves or strong-holds are to this day found in Judea; we read of them in several other parts of scripture. Gaza was on the west coast, near the Mediterranean sea. These invaders came from the east, consequently their ravages extended all across the country.

Ver. 7—10. *Israel rebuked by a prophet.*

Observe the method God took of working deliverance for Israel. Before he sent an angel to raise them up a saviour, he sent a prophet to reprove them for sin, and to bring them to repentance, ver. 8. This prophet is not named, but he was a man, a prophet, not an angel, as ch. 2. 1. His errand was to convince them of sin, that in their crying to the Lord, they might confess it with sorrow and shame, and not merely complain of their trouble. They cried to God for a deliverer, and God sent them a prophet to instruct them, and make them ready for deliverance. The sending prophets to a people, and the furnishing a land with faithful ministers, is a token for good, and an evidence that God has mercy in store for them.

We have here the heads of the message this prophet delivered to Israel, in the name of the Lord. He sets before them the great things God had done for them. He shows the easiness and equity of God's demands and expectations from them. And he charges them with rebellion against God. The charge is short, but very comprehensive; the malignity of their sin was disobedience to God; it brought these calamities upon them. He intends hereby to bring them to repentance: repentance is right and genuine, when the sinfulness of sin, as disobedience to God, is what we chiefly lament.

Ver. 11—24. *The angel of the Lord commissions Gideon to deliver Israel.*

The person commissioned to deliver Israel was Gideon, the son of Joash. The father was passed by, for he kept up in his own family the worship of Baal, which we may suppose this son, as far as was in his power, witnessed against. The person that gave him the commission, was an angel of the Lord. Not a created angel, but the Son of God himself, the eternal Word, the Lord of the angels, who appeared upon some great occasions in human shape, as a prelude to what he intended in the fulness of time, when he would take our nature upon him. This angel is here called Jehovah, the name of God, and he said, I will be with thee.

When this Divine person appeared to Gideon, he found him, 1. Retired; all alone. God often manifests himself to his people, when they are out of the noise and hurry of this world. Silence and solitude befriend our communion with God. 2. Employed in threshing wheat with a staff or rod: he had but a little to thresh, he needed not oxen to tread it out. The work he was about, was an emblem of that greater work to which he was now to be called, as the fishing of Christ's disciples. 3. Distressed; he was threshing his wheat, not in the proper place, but by the wine-press, in some private, unsuspected corner, for fear of the midianites. He himself shared in the common calamity, and now the angel came to animate him against Midian, when he himself could speak so feelingly of the heaviness of their yoke. The day of the greatest distress is God's time to appear for his people's relief.

Gideon was a man of a brave, active spirit, yet buried in obscurity through the iniquity of the times: but he is here animated to undertake something great, with that word, The Lord is with thee, or as the chaldee reads it, The Word of the Lord is thy help. It was very sure that the Lord was with him, when this angel was with him. By this word he has his commission. If we have God's presence with us, that will justify us, and bear us out in our undertakings. He inspires him with all necessary qualifications for the execution of his commission. Gideon was a mighty man of valour, yet he could bring nothing to pass without the presence of God, and that presence is enough to give a man courage at any time. In

his reply Gideon regards not the praise of his own valour. As if not conscious to himself of any thing great or encouraging in his own spirit, he fastens only on the assurance the angel had given him of God's presence, as that by which they held all their comfort. The angel spake in particular to him, The Lord is with thee, but he expostulates for all, If the Lord be with us, joining himself with the thousands of Israel, admitting no comfort but what they might share.

Gideon was as yet weak in faith, which made it hard to reconcile the assurances now given him of the presence of God, with the distress to which Israel was reduced. The angel gave a very effectual answer to his objections, by giving him a commission to deliver Israel out of the hands of the midianites, and assuring him of success therein. Now the angel is called Jehovah, he speaks as one having authority, and not as a messenger. There was something extraordinary in the look he now gave to Gideon; it was a gracious, favourable look, and silenced his fears. It was a speaking look, like Christ's upon Peter, a powerful look, a look that strangely darted new light and life into Gideon's breast, and inspired him with a generous warmth, far above what he felt before. But there was more in what he said. He commissioned him to appear and act as Israel's deliverer, and ratifies his commission with an appeal to his own authority; there needed no more; bishop Hall says, While God calls Gideon valiant, he makes him so.

Gideon made a modest objection against this commission. True faith is often weak, yet it shall not be rejected, but encouraged and strengthened. Or, he inquired concerning the methods he must take. Those who receive commissions from God, must expect and seek for instructions from him. Or, he is humble, self-diffident, and self-denying. I am utterly unfit for the service, and unworthy of the honour. God often chooses to do great things by those who are little, especially that are so in their own eyes. God delights to advance the humble. This objection was answered by a repetition of the promise, that God would be with him. Gideon desires to have his faith confirmed, touching this. He therefore humbly begs this Divine Person to give him a sign. Now, under the dispensation of the Spirit, we are not to expect signs

before our eyes, such as Gideon here desired, but must earnestly pray to God, that if we have found grace in his sight, he would show us a sign in our heart, by the powerful operations of his Spirit there, fulfilling the work of faith, and perfecting what is lacking in it.

All this while Gideon knew not an angel spoke with him. He saw a man stand before him like a traveller with a staff in his hand. Revelations in those corrupted times were so unusual, that Gideon might think of any thing rather than an angel. Yet the hope of such happy news stirs up in him both joy and thankfulness. Those rightly affected with the glad news of our spiritual deliverance, study to show loving respect to the messengers. The angel stays for the preparing Gideon's feast. Such pleasure God takes in the thankful endeavours of his servants, that he patiently waits upon our performances. Gideon intended a dinner, the angel turned it into a sacrifice. He whose meat and drink it was to do his Father's will, touches the feast with his staff, consumes it with fire from the stone, and departs. And now Gideon must needs think, He that can raise fire out of a stone, can raise courage and power out of my dead breast. He that by this fire hath consumed the broth and the flesh, can by the feeble flame of my fortitude consume Midian.—(34.)

The Angel turned the meat into an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto himself; showing hereby that he was not a man who needed meat, but the Son of God, who was to be served and honoured by sacrifice, and who in the fullness of time was to make himself a sacrifice. He brought fire out of the rock to consume this sacrifice; summoning it, not by striking the rock, as we strike fire out of a flint, but by a gentle touch given to the offering with the end of his staff. Hereby he gave Gideon a sign, that he had found grace in his sight, for God testified his acceptance of sacrifices by kindling them, if public, with fire from heaven, as those of Moses and Elias: if private, as this, with fire out of the earth—both were the effect of Divine power. This acceptance of his sacrifice evidenced the acceptance of his person, and confirmed his commission. He departed out of his sight immediately. He disappeared as a spirit. Here was as much of a sign as Gideon could wish. But Gideon, though

confirmed in his faith by the indications given of the Divinity of the Person who had spoken to him, yet was affrighted by it, till God graciously pacified him, and removed his fears.

Jehovah, as Gideon well knew, had said to Moses, Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me, and live, *Exod. 33. 20.* Hence originated his dread; but if he believed the apparition to be only a created angel, like one of those whom Jacob beheld at Mahanaim, he would no more have apprehended any danger of death than Jacob did. This fear of Gideon was exactly analogous to that of Manoah; and the exclamation of the latter, *ch. 13. 22,* explains the terror of the former.—(22.)

Ever since man has by sin exposed himself to God's wrath and curse, an express message from Heaven has been a terror to him, as he scarcely dares to expect good tidings thence. In this world of sense, it is very awful to have any sensible conversation with that world of spirits to which we are so much strangers. Gideon's courage failed him now. God speaks peace to him. The Lord was departed out of his sight. But though he must no longer walk by sight, he might still live by faith, that faith which comes by hearing; for the Lord said to him, with an audible voice, to this effect, Peace be unto thee, all is well, and be thou satisfied that it is so; fear not, he that came to employ thee did not intend to slay thee; thou shalt not die. See how ready God is to revive the hearts of those who tremble at his word and presence, and to give assurances of his mercy to them that stand in awe of his majesty.

The memorial of this vision, which Gideon set up, was a monument in form of an altar. It was of use to preserve the remembrance thereof by the name he gave to it, Jehovah-shalom, The Lord peace. This is the title of the Lord that spake to him: compare *Gen. 16. 13.* The same that is the Lord our righteousness, is our peace, *Eph. 2. 14.* Our Reconciler, and so our Saviour. Or, the substance of what he said to him, The Lord spake peace, and created that fruit of the lips; he bade me be easy when I was in that agitation. Or, A prayer grounded upon what he had said, The Lord send peace, that is, rest from the present trouble, for the public welfare lay nearest his heart.

Ver. 25—32. *Gideon destroys Baal's altar, and sacrifices to the Lord.*

God's visits, if gratefully received, shall be graciously repeated. Gideon is appointed to throw down Baal's altar, which, it seems, his father had built. See the power of God's grace, that he could raise up a reformer, and the condescensions of his grace, that he would raise up a deliverer, out of the family of a ringleader in idolatry. But Gideon now must not think it enough not to worship at that altar, which we charitably hope he had not done; he must throw it down; utterly demolish it. He must likewise cut down the grove by it, and erect an altar to God, to Jehovah his God. It had been wrong for him to have built an altar, even to the God of Israel, if God, who has not tied up himself to his own laws, had not bidden him do it. But now it was his duty, and an honour to be thus employed. God directs him to the place where he should build it, and he must not do it in a hurry, but in an orderly manner, according to the ancient law for altars raised on the occasion, that they must be of earth, not of hewn stone. On this altar he was to offer sacrifice. Two bullocks he must offer; his father's young bullock, and the second bullock of seven years old; so it should be read. The former, we may suppose, he was to offer for himself, the latter for the sins of the people, whom he was to deliver. It was requisite he should thus make peace with God, before he made war on Midian. Till sin be pardoned, through the great Sacrifice, no good is to be expected.

Gideon was obedient to the heavenly vision. He that was to command the Israel of God must be subject to the God of Israel; and, as a type of Christ, must first save his people from their sins, and then save them from their enemies. He did not scruple taking his father's bullock, and offering it to God without his father's consent, because God expressly commanded him to do so. While sure of the favour of God, he feared not the anger of men; he that bade him do this, would bear him out. To prevent resistance, he chose to do it by night; that he might not be disturbed in these sacred actions. Some think this was the same night in which God spake to him; and that as soon as he had received the orders, he immediately applied himself to execute them.

What was done was soon discovered. By the law of God, the worshippers of Baal were to die, but these wicked men impiously turn the penalty upon the worshippers of the God of Israel. How soon will idolaters become persecutors! He was rescued out of the hands of his persecutors by his own father. Many who have not courage enough to keep their integrity themselves, yet have so much conscience left, as makes them love and esteem those who do. If Joash had a kindness for Baal, yet he had a greater kindness for his son. His son perhaps had reasoned with him; or God, who has all hearts in his hands, had secretly and effectually influenced him to appear against the advocates for Baal, though he had complied with them formerly in the worship of Baal. It is good to appear for God when called to it, though few or none second us, because God can incline the hearts of those to stand by us, from whom we little expect it. Let us do our duty, and trust God with our safety.

Joash urges two things; 1. That it was absurd for them to plead for Baal. It is bad to commit sin, but it is great wickedness indeed to plead for it, especially to plead for Baal—or for that idol, whatever it is, which possesses that room in the heart which God should have. 2. It was needless for them to plead for Baal; if he were not a god, as was pretended, they could have nothing to say for him; if he were, he was able to plead for himself, as the God of Israel had often done by some judgment against those who put contempt upon him. Here is a challenge to Baal, to do either good or evil; the result convinced his worshippers of their folly, in praying to one to help them that could not avenge himself. After this Gideon remarkably prospered; thereby it appeared how unable Baal was to maintain his own cause. Gideon's father hereupon called him Jerubbaal, Let Baal plead, let him plead against him, if he can; if he have any thing to say for himself against his destroyer, let him say it. This name was a standing defiance to Baal.

The learned suppose, that Jerombalus, whom Sanchoniathon, one of the most ancient of all the heathen writers, speaks of as a priest of the god Jao, (a corruption of the name Jehovah,) and one to whose history he was indebted for a great deal of knowledge, was this Jerubbaal. He is called Jerubbesheth, in 2 Sam. 11. 21. Baal, which means, a lord, being fitly turned into Besheth, shame.—*Henry.*

Ver. 33—40. *Gideon's army, and the encouragement given him by signs.*

The view of the vast multitudes of the enemy discouraged Gideon, who for the confirmation of his own faith, and that of his troops, desired a miraculous sign of the Lord's presence. The first token did not quite satisfy him; yet conscious of his unbelief, he asked for the reversal of the sign with humble deprecation of the Lord's displeasure, and he obtained it. Though he asked another sign, yet he did it with such fear and trembling, as showed that the familiarity God had graciously admitted him to, did not produce contempt of God's glory, or presumption on God's goodness. God's favour must be sought with great reverence, due sense of our distance, and religious fear of his wrath. God graciously granted his request. God is tender of true believers, though they are weak, and ready to condescend to their infirmities, that the bruised reed may not be broken, nor the smoking flax quenched. Gideon would have the fleece wet and the ground dry; but lest any should object that it is natural for wool, if ever so little moisture fall, to drink it in, and retain it, though the quantity wrung out was sufficient to obviate that objection, he desires that next night the ground might be wet and the fleece dry. So willing is God to give to the heirs of promise strong consolation, Heb. 6. 17, 18, even by two immutable things, that he suffers himself, not only to be prevailed with by their importunities, but even to be prescribed to by their doubts and dissatisfactions.

These signs were truly miraculous, and therefore abundantly confirmed Gideon's commission. It is said of the dew, that it is from the Lord, and tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men, Micah 5. 7; yet God here hearkened to the voice of a man. As he did to Joshua, in directing the course of the sun, so to Gideon in directing that of the dew, by which it appears that it falls not by chance, but by Providence. And these signs were very significant. He and his men were going to engage the midianites; could God distinguish between a small fleece of Israel, and the vast floor of Midian? Yes, hereby Gideon is made to know that God could do so. Is Gideon desirous that the dew of Divine grace might descend upon himself in particular? He sees the fleece wet with dew to

assure him of it. Does he desire that God will be as the dew to all Israel? Behold, all the ground is wet.

What cause we sinners of the gentiles have to bless the Lord that the dew of heavenly blessings, once confined to Israel, now descends upon the inhabitants of the earth without limitation! Yet still the means of grace are dispensed in different measures according to the purposes of God. Even in the same congregation, one man's soul is like Gideon's moistened fleece, another like the dry ground.

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1—8. *Gideon's army reduced to three hundred men.*

Gideon rose up early. Now he is sure God is with him, he is impatient of delay. He pitched near a well, that his army might not be distressed for want of water, and he gained the higher ground. Faith in God's promises must not slacken, but rather quicken our endeavours. God provides that the praise of the intended victory may be reserved wholly to himself, by appointing only three hundred men to be employed in this service. The army consisted of thirty-two thousand men, a small number in comparison with the midianites. Gideon was ready to think them too few, but God declares they were too many. God would hereby show, that even when he employed likely instruments in his service, he did not need them, but could do his work without; so that he was not indebted to them for their service, but they to him for being employed. Hereby boasting was silenced and shut out: that is the reason here given by Him who knows the pride that is in men's hearts; Lest Israel vaunt themselves against me. Justly were they denied the honour of the service who would not give God the honour of the success.

Activity and prudence very properly accompany dependence upon God for assistance in our lawful undertakings. The Lord being acquainted with the secrets of every heart, varies his conduct with a wise regard to a multitude of circumstances which cannot be perceived by any others. When he sees that men are inclined to overlook him, and through unbelief to shrink from perilous services, or that through pride they would vaunt themselves against him, he will set them aside and do his work by other instru-

ments. Many profess themselves followers of Christ, helpers to his servants, and prepared to fight under his banner, while persecution and tribulation are at a distance; but without true faith and a good conscience the heart will fail in the immediate prospect of danger. Some pretence will be found for deserting the cause and escaping the cross. But though a religious society may thus be diminished in numbers, yet it will gain as to purity, and may consequently expect an increased blessing from the Lord.

God took two ways to lessen their numbers. 1. He ordered all to be dismissed that would own themselves timorous and faint-hearted. There was a law for such a proclamation as this, Deut. 20. 8. 2. God directed the dismissal of all that remained, except three hundred men, and he did it by a sign. Gideon is ordered to bring his soldiers to the watering, probably to the well of Harod, and the stream that ran from it. He, or some appointed by him, must observe how they drank. They were all thirsty, and inclined to drink. The most part knelt down on their knees and put their mouths to the water, so they might get their full draught. But three hundred hastily took up water in their hands. By this further distinction it was provided that none should be employed but men that thought it long until they were engaged with the enemy, preferring the service of God and their country before necessary refreshments. Such as these God chooses to employ, who are not only well affected, but zealously affected in a good thing.

Thus strangely was Gideon's army reduced, instead of being recruited, as one would think it needed to be for so great an action. Then, instead of making them more serviceable by their equipment, they are made less so! Every soldier took his own provision, which was a trial of their faith, whether they could trust God, when they had no more provisions than they could carry; and a trial of their diligence, whether they would carry as much as they had occasion for. The three hundred men were furnished with trumpets, instead of weapons of war, as if they had been going rather for their amusement than to a battle.

They grudged not at the liberty of the others who were dismissed. In doing the duties required by God, we must not regard the forwardness or backwardness

of others, nor what they do, but what God looks for at our hands. He is a rare person who can endure that others should excel him in gifts or blessings, or in liberty, so that we may say it is by the special grace of God that we regard what God says to us, and not look to men what they do.—*Rogers.*

3. The Gilead usually mentioned in scripture, was to the east of Jordan. Some suppose there was another place of that name, near to which Gideon now was. *Hales* considers the passage refers to the israelites who had come from mount Gilead. Others read, Gilboa.

5. In the east, when persons come to water, and are unprovided with vessels to take it up, it is not uncommon for them hastily to take up some in their hands, and lap it thence, by which means they satisfy their thirst very quickly.

Ver. 9—15. *Gideon is encouraged by the dream and interpretation of a midianite.*

Gideon's army being thus diminished, God furnishes him with a good foundation to build his faith upon. Arise, get thee down with this handful of men unto the host; I have delivered it into thine hand—it is all thine own. The Lord knows the infirmities of his people, and what great encouragement they may sometimes take from a small matter. Knowing what would occur to Gideon, in that very part of the camp to which he would go down, he orders him to go down and hearken to what they said, that he might the more firmly believe what God said.

God prepared a dream in the head of one midianite, an interpretation in the mouth of another, and brought Gideon to hear both; made his enemies prophets of his victory, encouragers of the attempt, proclaimers of their own confusion. Even the enemies of God may have visions, and power to construe them aright. How usual for wicked men to be forewarned to their own destruction!—(34.)

The dream seemed to have little coherence or significance in it, but the interpretation evidently proved the whole to be from the Lord; and discovered that the name of Gideon had filled the midianites with terror. The small unarmed company headed by Gideon, had the midianites known about them, would have appeared as contemptible as the barley-cake, and no more likely to destroy their army, than that to overturn a tent. Gideon took this as a sure pledge of success; without delay he worshipped, and praised God, and returned with confidence to his three hundred men, who were the

host of the Lord, by whom he intended to deliver Israel. Wherever we are, we may speak to God, and worship him, and find a way open heavenward. God must have the praise of that which encourages our faith. And his providence must be acknowledged in events, which, though minute and seemingly accidental, prove serviceable to us.

Ver. 16—22. *The defeat of the midianites.*

The three hundred men, divided into three companies, encompassed the whole camp of the midianites. Concealing their lamps in their pitchers, they passed unobserved to their stations. Then, in the dead of the night, when most of the enemy were asleep, they occasioned a great alarm by breaking their pitchers, one against another, with as much noise as they could, blowing the trumpets, and shouting, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon. The enemy, in their confusion, concluded themselves surprised by a large army, and in the dark became apprehensive of each other. When some, by mistake, had been slain, the terror became more general, till every one was engaged in battle with his fellows. We may easily conceive that this stratagem would be successful; but it was the power of God that prepared the hearts of the midianites to receive the impression, and he set every man's sword against his fellow. The obedience of faith alone could have induced so defenceless a company to venture upon such an expedient.

This method of defeating the midianites may be alluded to, as typifying the destruction of the devil's kingdom in the world, by the preaching of the everlasting gospel, the sounding that trumpet, and the holding forth that light out of earthen vessels, for such are the ministers of the gospel, in whom the treasure of that light is deposited, 2 Cor. 4. 6, 7. Thus God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, a barley-cake to overthrow the tents of Midian, that the excellency of the power might be of God only. The gospel is a sword, not in the hand, but in the mouth, the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon; of God and Jesus Christ, of Him that sits on the throne, and the Lamb.

It also represents the terrors of the great day. If these pitchers, trumpets, and firebrands did so daunt and dismay the proud troops of Midian and Amalek, who shall be able to stand when the trum-

pet of the archangel shall sound, the elements shall be in flames, the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the Lord himself shall descend?

In this world the wicked are often left to avenge the cause of God upon each other, under the power of their delusions, and the fury of their passions. In the world to come, by mutual enmity and upbraidings, they will increase their miseries. See also how God often makes the enemies of his church instruments to destroy one another; it is a pity that the church's friends should ever be thus infatuated.

18. The word "sword" is printed in italics, as being supplied by the translators, from ver. 20. It has, however, been found in several manuscripts and ancient versions.—*T. H. Horne.*

Ver. 23—25. *The ephraimites take Oreb and Zeeb.*

Two chief commanders of the host of Midian were taken and slain by the ephraimites. Their names, perhaps, signified their nature; Oreb signifies a raven, and Zeeb a wolf. These, in their flight, had taken shelter, one in a rock, Isa. 2. 21; Rev. 6. 15, the other by a wine-press. But the places of their shelter were made the places of their slaughter, and the memory of it preserved in the names of the places, Here fell the princes of Midian.

Rogers observes, It were to be wished that we all did as these did, that where help is needed and required by one of another, that it were willingly and readily performed. And that if there were any excellent and profitable matter begun, we were willing to have other fellow-labourers to the finishing and perfecting the same, and not as oft-times we hinder one another.

25. Or, at the passage of Jordan.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ver. 1—3. *Gideon pacifies the ephraimites.*

No sooner were the midianites subdued, than, through the violence of some, the israelites were ready to quarrel among themselves. An unhappy spark was struck, which, if Gideon had not with wisdom and grace extinguished immediately, might have broken out into a flame of fatal consequence. The ephraimites, when they brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, instead of congratulating his successes, and thanking him for his services, began to quarrel with him. Those who will not attempt or venture

any thing in the cause of God, will be the most ready to censure and quarrel with such as are of a more zealous and enterprising spirit. Those who are the most reluctant to difficult services, will be the most exasperated to be excluded from the credit of them.

Gideon stands here a great example of self-denial; and shows us, that envy is best removed by humility. Even right works are often envied, Eccl. 4. 4. Yet they are not likely to be so, when those who do them appear not to be proud of them. They are malignant indeed, who seek to cast those down from their excellency, who abase themselves. Humility is likewise the surest method of ending strife, for only by pride comes contention, Prov. 13. 10. Humility is most amiable and admirable in the midst of great attainments and advancements. Gideon's conquests greatly set off his condescension. It is the proper act of humility to esteem others better than ourselves, and in honour to prefer one another.

What was the issue of this controversy? The ephraimites had given vent to their passion in very improper liberty of speech, a certain sign of a weak and indefensible cause; reason runs low when chiding flies high. But Gideon's soft answer turned away their wrath, Prov. 15. 1. It is intimated that they retained some resentment; but he prudently overlooked this, and let it cool by degrees. Great and good men must expect to have their patience tried, by the unkindnesses and follies even of those they serve, and must not be troubled thereby.

Ver. 4—12. *The men of Succoth and Peniel refuse to relieve Gideon.*

Gideon pursued the remaining midianites, and bravely followed up his blow. His resolution was exemplary; he effected his purpose under the greatest disadvantages and discouragements. He took none with him but his three hundred men, who laid aside their trumpets and torches, and betook themselves to their swords and spears. God had said, By these three hundred men will I save you, ch. 7. 7. Confiding in that promise, Gideon kept to them only. He expected more from three hundred men, supported by a particular promise, than from many thousands supported only by their own valour. They were faint, yet pursuing; much fatigued with what they had done, yet eager to do more against their enemies.

Our spiritual warfare must thus be prosecuted with what strength we have, though we have but little; it is many a time the true christian's case, fainting, and yet pursuing.

The world knows but little of the persevering and successful struggle the real believer maintains with his sinful propensities. But the ultimate object of his pursuit is as clearly defined as Gideon's. He also has formed the fixed resolution of taking up no resting-place, nor being satisfied with any attainment short of perfect resemblance to the image of the Son of God—the object which forms the great business of his life is too plain to be misunderstood. He does not expect there will be nothing painful, nothing discouraging in his spiritual warfare. But he has recourse to the great motive from which he is to gather new encouragement, and betakes himself to that strength, in the faith of which he began his conflict, and by the supply of which alone he can finish it in triumph.—(29.)

Though Gideon met with discouragement from some of his own people; and was derided for what he was doing, as going about what he could never accomplish, yet he went on with it. If those that should be our helpers in the way of our duty, prove hinderances to us, let not that drive us from it. Those know not how to value God's acceptance, who know not how to despise the reproaches and contempt of men. It is evident he spared no pains to complete his victory. Now he found the advantage to have men who could bear hunger, and thirst, and toil. It seems he set upon the enemy by night, as before, for the host was secure. The security of sinners often proves their ruin, and dangers are most fatal when least feared. His success was very encouraging to resolution and industry in a good cause. He routed the army, and took the two kings prisoners. The fear of the wicked shall come upon him. They that think to run from the sword of the Lord and of Gideon, do but run upon it.

Ver. 13—17. *Succoth and Peniel punished.*

Gideon, as a righteous judge, chastised the men of Succoth, and the men of Peniel. Their crime was great. The princes of Succoth neither feared God, nor regarded man. In contempt of God, they refused the just demands of him whom God had raised up to save them, affronted Gideon, despised the success he had al-

ready been honoured with, despaired of the success of his present undertaking, did what they could to discourage him, and were willing to believe that the remaining forces of Midian would be too hard for him. The men of Peniel gave the same answer to the same request, defying the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon.

The active servants of God will always meet with more dangerous opposition from degenerate professors than from open enemies; but they must not regard the behaviour of those who are israelites in name, but midianites in heart, who vainly wish to observe a neutrality. They must carry on warfare through manifold tribulations, pursuing the enemies of their own souls, and of the cause of God, though ready to faint through inward conflicts and outward hardships. And they shall be enabled to persevere. The less men help, and the more they seek to hinder, the more effectually will the Lord assist.

Gideon did not punish these offenders immediately, because he would not lose time from the pursuit of the enemy; but he told them how he would punish them. He did this to show the confidence he had of success in the strength of God, and that if they had the least grace and consideration left, they might repent of their folly, and humble themselves. God gives notice of danger, and space to repent, that sinners may flee from the wrath to come.

The warning being slighted, the punishment, though severe, was very just. A young man seems to have described in writing the princes of Succoth; they were first made examples. Gideon was thus able to distinguish between the innocent and the guilty, and so to inflict punishment upon the offenders only. He punished them with thorns and briers, but it should seem, not unto death. The correction was intended, not for destruction, but for discipline, to make them wiser and better for the future. He made them know, so the word is, made them know themselves and their folly, God and their duty. Many are taught with the briers and thorns of affliction, who would not learn otherwise. God gives wisdom by the rod and reproof, chastens and teaches, and by correction opens the ear to discipline. Our blessed Saviour, though he were a Son, yet learned obedience by the things he suffered, Heb. 5. 8. Let every prickling brier, and grieving thorn, especially when it becomes a thorn in the

flesh, be thus interpreted, thus improved; By this God designs to teach me; what good lesson shall I learn? Penue!s doom comes next; Gideon used them more severely than the others, for good reason, no doubt, and he beat down their tower. What men make their pride, the ruin of it is justly made their shame.

Ver. 18—21. *Gideon avenges his brethren.*

Judgment began at the house of God, in the just correction of the men of Succoth and Penue!, who were israelites; but it did not end there. The kings of Midian must be reckoned with. These kings had slain the brethren of Gideon, therefore he was the avenger of blood upon them. As they were not of the devoted nations of Canaan, he might otherwise have spared them, and he declared that he would have done so.

As they confessed themselves guilty of this murder, Gideon acted in the character of an avenger of blood, being the next of kin to the persons slain. Little did they think to have heard of this so long after; but murder seldom goes unpunished in this life. Sins long forgotten by man must be accounted for to God. Sinful measures of self-preservation only bring on the transgressor's destruction, especially when innocent blood has been shed. The execution was done by Gideon himself, because he was the avenger of blood. He bade his son slay them, for he was a near relation to the persons murdered, and fittest to be his father's representative. But the young man feared because he was yet a youth. The prisoners themselves desired that, if they must die, they might die by his own hand, which would be more honourable to them, and more easy, for, As is the man, so is his strength. The execution of atrocious criminals is not a dishonourable service; but we should be thankful to be employed in saving men's lives instead of destroying them. What miserable consolation in death is derived from the hope of suffering less pain, and of dying with less disgrace, than some others! yet many are more anxious upon these accounts than concerning the future judgment, and its eternal consequences. Gideon despatched them quickly, and seized the ornaments on their camels' necks, ornaments like the moon, badges of their royalty, or of their idolatry. Ashtaroth was represented by the moon, as Baal by the sun. With these he took all their other

ornaments, as appears ver. 26, where we find he did not put them to a good use. The destruction of these two kings, and that of the two princes, ch. 7. 25, is long after pleaded as a precedent in prayer concerning the ruin of the enemies of the church, Psa. 83. 11.

Ver. 22—28. *Gideon declines the government, gives occasion for idolatry—Midian subdued.*

Gideon refused the government which the people offered him. It was very desirable that he, who in this great and critical juncture had received such manifest tokens of God's presence, should preside in their affairs. Let us here think of the Lord Jesus; he hath delivered us out of the hands of our enemies, our spiritual enemies, the worst and most dangerous, and therefore it is fit he should rule over us. How can we be better ruled than by one who has so great an interest in heaven, and so great a kindness for this earth? We are delivered, that we may serve him without fear, Luke 1. 74, 75. It was honourable in Gideon to refuse it. What he did, was with design to serve them, not to rule them; to make Israel safe and happy, not to make himself great or honourable. He thought the honour of doing good was recompence enough for all his services, which needed not to be rewarded with the honour of bearing sway; he that is greatest, let him be your minister. It shows his piety and the great opinion he had of God's government. No good man can be pleased with any honour done to himself, which ought to be peculiar to God.

We see Gideon's irregular zeal to perpetuate the remembrance of this victory, by an ephod, made of the choicest of the spoils. This was plausible, and might be well intended to preserve a memorial of so Divine a victory in the judge's own city. But it was a very unadvised thing to make that memorial to be an ephod, a sacred garment. It is right to put the best construction that can be upon the actions of good men, and such a one we are sure Gideon was. But we have reason to suspect that this ephod had, as usual, a teraphim annexed to it, ch. 17. 5; Hos. 3. 4; and that having an altar already built by Divine appointment, ch. 6. 26, which he erroneously imagined he might still use for sacrifice, Gideon intended this for an oracle, to be consulted in doubtful cases. However, this might be honestly intended, and though at first

it might do little hurt, yet in process of time Israel went after it; by degrees their respect thereto grew more and more superstitious. Many are led into false ways by one false step of a good man. The beginning of sin, particularly of idolatry and will-worship, is as the letting forth of water; so it has been in the fatal corruptions of the church of Rome, therefore leave it off before it be meddled with. It became a snare to Gideon himself, abating his zeal for the house of God in his old age, and much more to his house, who were drawn by it into sin, it proved the ruin of the family. How soon will ornaments which feed the lust of the eye, and form the pride of life, as well as the indulgences of the flesh, become the shame of those who were fond of them!

The midianites gave Israel no more disturbance. Gideon, though he would not assume the honour and power of a king, governed as a judge, and did all the good offices he could for his people; so that the country was in quietness forty years.

27. The ephod was a rich sacerdotal garment. Probably it was not used for idolatrous purposes till after the death of Gideon.

Ver. 29—35. *Gideon's death—Israel's idolatry and ingratitude.*

We have here the conclusion of the story of Gideon. He lived privately. His family was multiplied. He died in honour, in a good old age, when he had lived as long as he was capable of serving God and his country; and who would desire to live any longer? And he was buried in the sepulchre of his fathers. As soon as Gideon was dead, who had kept the people close to the worship of the God of Israel, they found themselves under no restraint, and then they went after Baalim. In this revolt of Israel to idolatry, they showed great ingratitude to God; both judgments and mercies were forgotten, and the impressions of them lost. Also, great ingratitude to Gideon. Much good had been done by him to Israel, as a father to his country, for which they ought to have been kind to his family. But Israel showed not this kindness. No wonder if those who forget their God, forget their friends. Yet conscious of our own ingratitude to God, and observing that of mankind in general, we should learn to be patient under the unsuitable returns we meet with for our poor services, and resolve

after the Divine example, not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good.

The memorial of Gideon's actions is preserved by Sanchoniatho, a tyrian writer that lived soon after him, whose antiquity is attested by Porphyry, perhaps the most inveterate enemy to christianity that ever lived.—*T. H. Horne.*

CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 1—6. *Abimelech conspires with the shechemites, murders his brethren, and is made king.*

The apostasy of Israel after the death of Gideon, was punished, not as the former apostasies, by foreign invasion, or the oppressions of any neighbouring power, but by intestine broils among themselves, of which in this chapter we have the account; and it is hard to say, whether their sin, or their misery, appears most. It is an account of the usurpation and tyranny of Abimelech, who was base son to Gideon. He thrust himself into the government at Shechem, his own city, by subtilty and cruelty, particularly by the murder of his brethren. See in this bloody tragedy the power of ambition, how it will break through all the ties of natural affection and natural conscience, and sacrifice to its designs all that is most sacred, dear, and valuable. Strange that ever it should enter into the heart of a man to be so barbarous! See also the peril of honour, and high birth. Their being the sons of so great a man as Gideon, exposed them thus, and made Abimelech jealous of them. Let none envy those of high extraction, or complain of their own meanness and obscurity. The lower, the safer.

Way being thus made, the men of Shechem proceeded to choose Abimelech king. God was not consulted whether they should have any king, much less who it should be. Here is no advising with the priest, or with their brethren of any other city or tribe, though it was designed he should reign over Israel. But the shechemites aided and abetted Abimelech in the murder of his brethren, and then made him king. The rest of the israelites were unconcerned; they took no care to check this usurpation, to protect the sons of Gideon, or to avenge their death, but were lost to all sense of honour and liberty, justice and gratitude.

If parents could see what their children would do, and what they are to suffer,

their joy in them often would be turned into lamentation: we may be thankful that we cannot see into futurity. Above all, we should fear, and watch against sin; for our misconduct may produce fatal effects upon our families, and upon society after we are in our graves. Every age produces Abimelechs who hesitate not at any crimes to accomplish their designs, and it is surprising how they impose upon thousands to agree with them.

Ver. 7—21. *Jotham rebukes the shechemites by a parable, and foretells their ruin.*

Parables, or fables, by which some important truth is conveyed to the mind under a similitude, have been used by wise men in all ages, as an advantageous method of teaching salutary lessons of justice and prudence. They were sanctioned by the constant use of them by our Lord Jesus Christ. The *truth* of a parable lies in the *instruction* it contains, and the feigned circumstances being known to be such, are no ways inconsistent with veracity, but serve the cause of truth.

In this parable of Jotham, the folly, ingratitude, and wickedness of the shechemites are represented with much ingenuity and simplicity. His preface is very serious, Harken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you. Those who expect God to hear their prayers, must be willing to hear reason, to hear a faithful reproof, and to hear the complaints and appeals of wronged innocence. Jotham hereby applauds the generous conduct of Gideon, and the other judges before him, and perhaps of the sons of Gideon, who declined accepting the state and power of kings when they might have had it. In general all wise and good men decline preferment, and choose rather to be useful than to be great.

There was no occasion for the trees to choose a king, they are all the trees of the Lord which he has planted, Psa. 104. 16, and which therefore he will protect. Nor was there any occasion for Israel to talk of setting a king over them, for the Lord was their King. When the trees would choose a king, they did not offer the government to the stately cedar, or the lofty pine, which are not useful till cut down, but to the fruit-trees, the vine, and the olive. Those who bear fruit for the public good, are justly respected and honoured by all that are wise, more than

those who merely make a figure. The reason was much the same which all these fruit-trees gave for their refusal to be promoted over the trees; or, as the margin reads it, to go up and down for the trees. This intimates that government involves a man in a great deal both of toil and care; he that is promoted over the trees must go up and down for them, and makes himself a drudge to business. Also, that those who are preferred to public trust and power, must forego all private interests and advantages for the good of the community. The fig-tree must lose its sweetness, its sweet retirement, sweet repose, and sweet conversation and contemplation, if it go to be promoted over the trees, and must undergo constant fatigue. And those advanced to honour and dignity, are in great danger of losing their fatness and fruitfulness. Preferment is apt to make men proud and slothful; and that spoils the usefulness with which, in a lower sphere, they honoured God and man. For which reason, they that desire to do good, are afraid of being too great.

Jotham exposes the foolish ambition of Abimelech, whom he compares to the bramble or thistle, a worthless plant, not to be numbered among the trees, useless and fruitless, nay, hurtful and vexatious, scratching, and tearing, and doing mischief; it began with the curse, and its end is to be burned. Such a one was Abimelech, and yet chosen to the government by the trees, by all the trees; this election seems to have been more unanimous than any of the others. Let us not think it strange, if we see folly set in great dignity, Eccl. 10. 6, and the vilest men exalted, Psa. 12. 8, and men blind to their own interest in the choice of their guides. The bramble being chosen to the government, takes no time to consider whether he should accept it or not; but immediately assures them they should find him as he found them. See what great swelling words of vanity he speaks, ver. 15, what promises he makes to his faithful subjects—Let them come and trust in his shadow: a goodly shadow to trust in! How unlike to the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, to which a good magistrate is compared, Isa. 32. 2. Trust in his shadow! More likely to be injured by him than benefited. Thus men boast of a false gift. Yet he threatens with as much confidence as he promises;

If ye be not faithful, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon—it was more likely to catch fire and be itself devoured!

Jotham's application is very close and plain. He reminds them of the good services his father had done for them. He urges their unkindness to his father's family; they had not done to him according to the deserving of his hands. He leaves it to the event to determine whether they had done well, whereby he appeals to the Divine providence. Jotham, having given this admonition, escaped with his life. For fear of Abimelech, he lived in exile. Those whose extraction and education are high, know not to what difficulties and straits they may be reduced.

7. Mount Gerizim was near Shechem, now Napolose. Josephus says that the inhabitants were assembled on a public occasion when Jotham addressed them from an elevated part of the mountain.

13. The word here and in some places elsewhere rendered god, when so placed, denotes men of high degree, not the Deity. This may also refer to wine being used in sacrifices.

20. Millo is supposed, by the editor of Calmet, to have been the same place as the tower mentioned ver. 46; the name denotes a fortified place, or place for troops. Others consider it to have been a place where the chief persons of Shechem used to assemble. There was a house of Millo in Jerusalem.

Ver. 22—29. *The shechemites conspire against Abimelech.*

Abimelech is seated in the throne his father refused, and no rival is seen to envy him. But how long does this glory last? Stay but three years, and see the bramble withered and burned! The prosperity of the wicked is short and fickle. It had been pity that the shechemites should have been plagued by any other hand than Abimelech's. They raised him unjustly to the throne; they are the first that feel the weight of his sceptre.—(34.)

They grew uneasy at his government, blamed his conduct, and quarrelled at his impositions. This was from God. He permitted the devil, that great mischief-maker, to sow discord between them, and he is an evil spirit, whom God not only keeps under check, but sometimes serves his own purposes by. Their own lusts were evil spirits, they are devils in men's own hearts, from them come wars and fightings. God gave them up to these, and so might be said to send the evil spirits between them. When men's sin is made their punishment, though God is not the Author of the sin, yet the punish-

ment is from him. 1. Sooner or later God will make inquisition for innocent blood, and will return it on the heads of those who shed it. 2. Accessories shall be reckoned with, as well as principals, in that and other sins. 3. Those who combine together to do wickedly, are justly dashed in pieces against each other. Blood cannot be lasting cement to any interest.

The shechemites entertained one Gaal, and set him up in opposition to Abimelech. This Gaal is said to be the son of Ebed. The word Ebed signifies a slave; such his father seems to have been, one of the remnant of the canaanites, who boasted his descent from Hamor, Gen. 34. Yet the israelites made him the head of their conspiracy against Abimelech. Under this fancied protector they gathered in their harvest and vintage, kept a feast to the honour of Baalberith, and in their revellings cursed Abimelech. Had they forsaken idolatry when they deserted the usurper, it had been well.

29. Or, And I would say to Abimelech.

Ver. 30—49. *Abimelech destroys Shechem.*

How could the shechemites hope to speed in their attempt, when the ruler of their city was in the interests of their enemy? They knew it, yet took no care to secure him. Abimelech drew his forces upon Shechem by night, and Gaal, having been betrayed by Zebul, was bantered by him. Though the generality of the city still continued averse to Abimelech, yet they did not oppose Gaal's expulsion; both conduct and courage failed when there was occasion for them. Abimelech, the next day, set upon the city, and destroyed it for their treacherous dealings. Abimelech intended hereby to punish the shechemites for slighting him now, but God punished them for their serving him formerly in the murder of Gideon's sons. Thus when God makes use of men as instruments in his hand to do his work, *he* means one thing, and *they* another, Isa. 10. 6, 7. They design to maintain their honour, but God to maintain his.

Those retired into a strong-hold of their idol-temple, were all destroyed there. These are called the men of the tower of Shechem, they put themselves under the protection of their idol; thus all people walk in the name of their god, and shall not we then choose to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life? For in the time of trouble he shall hide us in

his pavilion, Psa. 27. 5. The name of the Lord is a strong tower, Prov. 18. 10. But that which they hoped would have been for their welfare, proved a snare and a trap, as those will certainly find, who run to idols for shelter; it will prove a refuge of lies. Some think the men of the tower of Shechem were the same with the house of Millo, and then Jotham's just imprecation was answered in the letter.

36. Or, the shadow of the rocks scattered over the ground.

45. Sowing the site where a house had stood, or any other place, with salt, implied that it was to remain desolate; this has been practised in later times.

Ver. 50—57. *Abimelech slain at Thebez.*

We have seen the ruin of the shechemites completed by the hand of Abimelech; now he is reckoned with, who was their leader in villany. Thebez was a city not far from Shechem, in confederacy with it. Abimelech drove the inhabitants of the town into the castle. He attempted to force an entrance. In the attempt, he was struck down with a piece or part of a mill-stone. Evil pursues sinners, and sometimes overtakes them when not only at ease, but triumphant. The mighty things of the world often are confounded by the weakest, and those things which have been made light of.

Observe in the death of Abimelech, his foolish pride, as to this little circumstance of disgrace. Here was no care taken about his precious soul, no concern what would become of that, no prayer to God for mercy, but very solicitous he is to patch up his shattered credit, when there is no patching of his shattered skull! Let it never be said that such a mighty man as Abimelech was killed by a woman! The man was dying, but his pride was alive and strong, and the same vain-glorious humour that had governed him all along, appears to the last. As was his life, such was his death. As God punished his cruelty by the manner of his death, so he punished his pride by the instrument of it. Observe also his project to avoid this disgrace; his own servant must run him through, that men say not, A woman slew him. Could he think this would conceal what the woman had done, and not rather proclaim it the more? Nay, it added to the infamy of his death, for hereby he becomes a self-murderer! Better have it said, A woman slew him, than it should be said, His servant slew him by his own order; yet now

both will be said of him to his everlasting reproach. And this very thing which Abimelech was in such care to conceal, appears to have been more particularly remembered by posterity, than most passages of his history. Joab speaks of it, as that with which he expected David would reproach him, for coming so nigh the wall, 2 Sam. 11. 21. We do but perpetuate the remembrance of the ignominy we seek to avoid by sin.

Abimelech being slain, Israel's peace was restored, and God's justice was glorified. God punished the wickedness of Abimelech, and of the men of Shechem, and performed Jotham's curse, for it was not a curse causeless. The Lord is known by the judgments which he executes when the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Though wickedness may prosper a while, it will not prosper always. The history of mankind, if impartially related, would greatly resemble that of this chapter. The records of the most splendid events present to our views such contests for power. Such scenes, though subjects for panegyric among poets, orators, and historians, are of little use but to illustrate the scripture doctrine of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart, the force of men's lusts, and the effects of Satan's influence. Here let us learn thankfulness for the gospel of Jesus Christ, whose kingdom is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Lord, thou hast given us thy word of truth and righteousness! O pour upon us thy Spirit of purity, peace, and love, and write thy holy law in our hearts, we beseech thee—else all our outward mercies will but enhance our guilt, and increase our condemnation.

53. The corn in the east is ground by women for the use of each family in mills formed of two flat stones small enough to be turned by the hand. One of these was thrown upon Abimelech.

CHAPTER X.

Ver. 1—5. *Tola and afterwards Jair, judge Israel.*

Quiet and peaceable reigns, though the best to live in, yield least variety of matter for the historian. Such were the reigns of Tola and Jair. But no doubt, they were both raised up of God to serve their country as judges, not pretending, like Abimelech, to the grandeur of kings, nor, like him, taking the honour they had to themselves—they were called of God

to it. Concerning Tola, it is said, that he arose after Abimelech to defend Israel. God animated this good man to reform abuses, put down idolatry, appease tumults, and heal the wounds given to the state by Abimelech's usurpation. He bore the name of an ancestor of his tribe; Tola was the first of the sons of Issachar, Gen. 46. 13. It signifies a worm, yet being the name of his ancestor, he was not ashamed of it. Though he was of Issachar, he came and dwelt in mount Ephraim, which was more in the heart of the country, that the people might the better resort to him for judgment. Nor was he the worse fitted for being the Lord's instrument for good to his people, if his opinion of himself accorded with his humble name. Jair was a gileadite. What is chiefly remarkable concerning him, is, the increase and honour of his family; he had thirty sons. As deputies to their father, they rode from place to place to administer justice. They had every one a city, out of those called from their ancestor, of the same name with their father, Havoth-jair, the villages of Jair; yet they were called cities. Villages are cities to a contented mind.

Ver. 6—9. *The philistines and ammonites oppress Israel.*

The israelites having again cast off the worship of Jehovah, and multiplied their idols, were delivered into the hands of the philistines on the west, and the ammonites on the east, who betwixt them crushed the people for eighteen years, but most terribly toward the close of them. Now the threatening was fulfilled, that they should be slain before their enemies, and should have no power to stand before them, Lev. 26. 17, 37. By their ways and their doings they procured this to themselves; they were sadly degenerated, and so they came to be sorely distressed.

Ver. 10—18. *The Lord sends Israel to their false gods—Upon their repentance he pities them.*

God is able to multiply men's punishments according to the number of their iniquities and idols. But there is hope when sinners cry to the Lord for help, and lament their ungodliness as well as more scandalous transgressions. God shows them how justly he might now abandon them to ruin, by abandoning them to the gods they had served. To awaken them to thorough repentance and

reformation, he lets them see their folly in serving Baalim; they had been at a vast expense to obtain the favour of gods that could not help them, when they most needed their help. "Go, and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen, ver. 14, try what they can do for you now. You have worshipped them as gods, try if they have either Divine power, or Divine goodness, to be employed for you." It is necessary, in true repentance, that there be a full conviction of the utter insufficiency of all those things to help us and to do us any kindness, which we have idolized and set upon the throne in our hearts, in competition with God.

Israel made humble submission to God's justice, with a humble application to his mercy, ver. 15. The children of Israel met together in a solemn assembly, received the message God sent them, were not driven by it to despair, though it was very threatening, but resolved to lie at God's feet; if they perish, they will perish there. They not only repeat their confession, We have sinned; but surrender themselves to God's justice; they own they deserved the severest tokens of God's displeasure, and were sure he could do them no wrong, whatever he laid upon them. True penitents dare, and will, refer themselves to God to correct them as he thinks fit. They acknowledged what they deserved, yet pray to God not to deal with them according to their deserts. We must submit to God's justice, with a hope in his mercy. True repentance is not only *for* sin, but *from* sin.

They could only expect that the Lord would deliver them no more, as he here declares. This is spoken after the manner of men. It shows what they deserved, the demands of God's justice, and the consequences of impenitence: but such threatenings always imply a reserve of mercy for those who repent. Compassion as effectually moved the Lord to relieve his oppressed people, as a man is urged to assist a wretched fellow-creature, or as a father is disposed to assist his suffering child. As the disobedience and misery of a child are a grief to a tender father, and make him feel very sensibly from his natural affection; so the provocations of God's people are grief to him, Psa. 95. 10, so far is he from having any pleasure in the death of sinners.

Here mercy never can be sought in vain.

Let then the trembling sinner, and the almost despairing backslider, cease from inquiring about God's secret purposes, or expecting to extract hope from former experiences. Let them not indulge despondence, nor yield to indolence. Let them cast themselves upon the mercy of God our Saviour, patiently submit to his chastisement, humble themselves under his hand, seek deliverance from the powers of darkness upon any terms, separate themselves from sin, and as much as possible from all occasions of it, use the means of grace diligently, and wait the Lord's time, and they shall certainly rejoice in his mercy. But let all those who think they stand, take heed lest they fall; and may the Lord help us to cleave to him with full purpose of heart. God had said, I will deliver you no more; but now they are not what they were, they are other men, they are new men, and now he will deliver them. The Lord did not on this occasion, as usual, expressly appoint them a deliverer; but he secretly directed their choice of one, and openly confirmed the appointment.

CHAPTER XI.

Ver. 1—3. *The origin of Jephthah.*

Jephthah seems to have been the son of a woman of bad character, a strange woman, either a foreigner, or an israelite, thus called on account of her conduct. The law of Moses did not allow such persons to enter the congregation of the Lord; and offices in church or state seem especially to have been intended by that law, Deut. 23. 2. But the princes of Gilead did not recollect that law, or thought it might be dispensed with, especially as Jephthah had begun to fight the ammonites. The Lord was pleased to confirm their choice. Those who had made themselves vile by their sins were to be delivered by one himself under disgrace, though not by his own fault. Men ought not to be reproached with their parentage or extraction, so long as they by their personal merits roll away any reproach. One like Jephthah, if born again, born from above, shall be accepted of God, and be as welcome as any other to the glorious liberties of his children.

A number of men of broken fortunes and unsettled dispositions joined him. It does not appear that they attempted any

thing improper, but made reprisals on the nations that oppressed Israel. In this way of life they learned hardness, boldness, and military skill. Jephthah thus became known, and being a godly man, we may suppose that he instructed his followers in true religion, as David appears to have done in similar circumstances.

Ver. 4—11. *The agreement between Jephthah and the gileadites.*

The case between the gileadites and Jephthah, resembled the general state of the case between Israel and God at this time. They had thrust God out by their idolatries, yet in their distress begged his help; he told them how justly he might have rejected them, yet graciously delivered them. So did Jephthah. Many slight God and good men, till they come to be in distress; then they are desirous of God's mercy, and good men's prayers.

They were urgent with him to accept the government. Let this be, 1. A caution to us not to despise any because they are mean, or to be injurious to any against whom we have advantage; whatever we think of them now, the time may come when we may have need of them. It is our wisdom to make no man our enemy, we know not how soon our distresses may be such, that we may be anxious to make him our friend. 2. An encouragement to men of worth who are slighted and ill-treated; let them bear it with meekness and cheerfulness, leaving it to God to make their light shine out of obscurity.

God had forgiven Israel, and therefore Jephthah will forgive. He speaks not with too much confidence of his success, knowing how justly God might suffer the ammonites to prevail for the further punishment of Israel. Nor does he speak with any confidence at all in himself. If he succeed, it is the Lord delivers them into his hand, intending thereby to remind his countrymen to look up to God as the Giver of victory. If, by the blessing of God, I come home a conqueror, tell me plainly, shall I be your head? If I deliver you, under God, shall I, under him, reform you? The same question is put to those who desire salvation by Christ. If he save you, will ye be willing he shall rule you? On no other terms will he save you; if he make you happy, shall he make you holy? If he be your Helper, shall he be your Head? They appeal to God's omniscience as the judge of their

present sincerity, and to his justice as an avenger, if afterward they should prove false. The Lord be a hearer, so the word is. Whatever we speak, it concerns us to remember that God is a hearer, and to speak accordingly. Thus was the original contract ratified between Jephthah and the gileadites, which all Israel, it seems, agreed to afterward; for it is said, ch. 12. 7, he judged Israel. Jephthah, to obtain this little honour, was willing to expose his life: shall we be discouraged in our christian warfare by the difficulties we may meet with, when Christ himself has promised a crown of life to him that overcometh?

Jephthah piously acknowledged God in this great affair,—He uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh. Upon his elevation, he retired, and in prayer spread the whole matter before God; both his choice to the office, and his execution of the office, as one that looked toward the Lord, and would do nothing without him; that leaned not to his own understanding or courage, but depended on God and his favour. He utters before God all his thoughts and cares in this matter. God gives us leave to be free with him. This is a rare example, and to be imitated by all, particularly by great ones. In all our ways let us acknowledge God, seek his favour, ask counsel at his mouth, and take him with us; so shall we make our way prosperous. Thus Jephthah opened the campaign with prayer. That was likely to end gloriously, which began piously.

11. This Mizpeh was east of Jordan in the land of Gilead.

Ver. 12—28. *He attempts in vain to make peace with the ammonites.*

Jephthah, having authority, sent to the king of Ammon, who was the aggressor, to demand his reasons for invading the land of Israel. Perhaps, by Divine direction, he proposed peace to the ammonites before he declared war against them, according to the law of Moses, Deut. 20. 10, 11. If the children of Ammon could convince him that Israel had done wrong, he was ready to restore the rights of the ammonites. If not, it was plain by their invasion that they did Israel wrong, and he was ready to maintain the rights of the israelites. A sense of justice should guide and govern us in all our undertakings.

The king of the ammonites made his

demand; Israel took away my land long since, now therefore restore these lands. The ammonites meant to spoil and plunder the country, as formerly under Eglon, ch. 3. 13. This reason was only to serve the present turn. Jephthah gives a full answer. The amorites were inhabitants of that country, and the Lord God of Israel, who is King of nations, whose the earth is, and the fulness thereof, he dispossessed the amorites, and planted Israel in their room. He urges him, Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee? Not that Jephthah thought Chemosh a god, he is only "thy god." But the worshippers even of those dunghill deities that could do neither good nor evil, thought they were beholden to them for all they had. He spake to the ammonites according to their notions. One instance of the honour and respect we owe to God, as our God, is, rightly to possess what he gives us to possess, receive it from him, use it for him, keep it for his sake, and part with it when he calls for it. He has given it us to possess, not to enjoy as our portion. He himself only must be our portion. By these and other arguments Jephthah justifies himself and his own cause. For deciding the controversy, he puts himself upon God. The Lord, the Judge, be judge this day. With this solemn reference of the matter to the Judge of heaven and earth, he designs to deter the ammonites from proceeding, when they saw the right of the cause was against them, or to justify himself in subduing them, if they should go on. It must always be thought dangerous to desire or expect that God should patronize unrighteousness. The king of the children of Ammon hearkened not to the words of Jephthah, his heart being hardened to his destruction.

The whole of this message shows that Jephthah was well acquainted with the historical part of the books of Moses. His argument was very clear, and his demand very reasonable. Those who possess the most courageous faith will be the most disposed for peace, and the readiest to make advances to obtain it; but rapacity and ambition often cloak their designs under a plea of equity, and render such endeavours unavailing.

Ver. 29—40. *Jephthah's vow—He vanquishes the ammonites—He performs his vow on his daughter.*

Several important lessons are to be

learned out of the history of Jephthah's vow. 1. There may be remainders of distrust and doubting, even in the hearts of true and great believers. Jephthah had reason to be confident of success, especially when he found the Spirit of the Lord come upon him, yet he seems to hesitate. 2. Our vows to God of some acceptable service to him, should not be as a purchase of the favour we desire, but as an expression of gratitude to him, and the deep sense of our obligations to render according to the benefit done us. The matter of such a vow (Lev. 27. 2.) must be something that has a plain and direct tendency to the advancement of God's glory, and the interests of his kingdom among men, or to the furtherance of ourselves in his service, and in our duty. 3. We have great need to be very cautious, and well-advised, in making vows, lest we entangle our own consciences, and involve ourselves in perplexities. Let Jephthah's harm be our warning in this matter. See Deut. 23. 22. 4. What we have solemnly vowed to God, we must conscientiously perform, if it be possible and lawful, though it be difficult and grievous to us. Jephthah's sense of the powerful obligation of his vow must always be ours. 5. It well becomes children, obediently and cheerfully to submit to their parents in the Lord; particularly to comply with their pious resolutions for the honour of God, and the keeping up religion in their families; though they maybe harsh and severe. Thus the rechabites acted, and Jephthah's daughter, who, for the satisfying of her father's conscience, and for the honour of God and her country, yielded herself as one devoted. Do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; I know I am dear to thee, but am well content that God should be dearer. 6. Our friends' grievances should be our griefs. Where she went to bewail her hard fate, the virgins, her companions, joined in her lamentations. Those are unworthy the name of friends, who will only rejoice with us, and not weep with us. 7. Heroic zeal for the honour of God and Israel, though alloyed with infirmity and indiscretion, is worthy to be had in perpetual remembrance. It well became the daughters of Israel, to preserve the honourable memory of Jephthah's daughter. 8. From Jephthah's concern on this occasion we must learn not to think it

strange if the day of our triumph in this world proves upon some account or other the day of our grief, and therefore must rejoice with trembling. We hope for a day of triumph hereafter which will have no alloy.

It is hard to say what Jephthah did to his daughter in performance of his vow. Some think that it being unlawful, according to one part of his vow, to offer her up for a burnt-offering, for they consider the parts are separate, he thus, according to the other part, engaged her to be the Lord's, that is, totally to sequester herself from all the affairs of this life, and consequently from marriage, and to employ herself wholly in acts of devotion all her days. Others suppose that Jephthah did sacrifice his daughter, and some justify him in it, and think he did as became one who preferred the honour of God before that which was dearest to him in this world. But most of these condemn Jephthah; he did ill to make so rash a vow, and worse to perform it. He could not be bound by his vow to what God had forbidden by the sixth commandment. God had forbidden human sacrifices. Concerning this, and some other such passages in the sacred history, about which learned men are divided and in doubt, we need not perplex ourselves; what is necessary to our salvation, thanks be to God, is plain enough.

If the reader recollects the promise of Christ concerning the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and places himself under this heavenly Teacher, the Holy Ghost will guide unto all truth in every intricate passage, so far as is necessary to be understood. Let us thus far imitate Jephthah's vow as to say, that if Jesus indeed be ours, and be formed in our hearts by the influences of his Holy Spirit, the hope of glory, then will we give up for an offering every other joy, and relinquish all that flesh and blood holds dear, so that Christ be the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever.—(37.)

Both *Henry* and *Scott* incline to consider that Jephthah's daughter was sacrificed. The opinion of most of the ancient fathers and commentators was the same; but the subject has been very fully discussed of late, and the weight of argument is generally considered to be, that she was *not* sacrificed, but consecrated. *T. H. Horne* observes, As there are express prohibitions of sacrificing children in Deut. 12. 30, 31; Psa. 106. 37, 38; Jer. 7. 31; and Ezek. 16. 20, 21, so there is not only no direction to sacrifice any other human creature

nor are there any rites appointed for such sacrifice; also it would have rendered the priest unclean by touching a dead body; and the sacrifice of a man is expressly declared to be abominable in Isa. 66. 3. As no devoted thing could be sacrificed, the law, Lev. 27. 28, cannot possibly relate to sacrifice, and is capable of a very different meaning. For though *Josephus*, and many commentators after him, are of opinion that Jephthah did really immolate his daughter, the probability is, that she was NOT sacrificed. This will appear from the rendering of a particle which the preceding considerations require to be taken disjunctively, and translated *or* instead of *and*, both in Lev. 27. 28, and Judges 11. 31. What further confirms this rendering, and, consequently, reconciles these passages, is, that Jephthah's rashness had time to cool, as his daughter went two months to bewail her consecration, which obliged her to remain single without posterity. It is further said she went to bewail this, not her sacrifice. Besides, the israelitish women went four times in the year to talk *with* (not *for*) the daughter of Jephthah, to lament her seclusion from the world, and the hardship of her situation, cut off from every domestic enjoyment. Further, it is not said that he *sacrificed* her, but that he did with her according to his vow. The subsequent remark of the sacred historian is uncalled for, if she were sacrificed, but not if she were compelled to remain single. On the whole we may safely conclude, that Jephthah's daughter was NOT sacrificed, but consecrated to a state of celibacy. Hannah dedicated her child to the service of the Lord, 1 Sam. 1. 11.

In the original the words are, "And it was a law in Israel that the daughters of Israel went yearly to make presents to the daughter of Jephthah the gileadite, four days in the year." The word here rendered "lament," is elsewhere translated reward, hire, gift. The use of it, Psa. 63. 18, is very remarkable, "Thou hast received gifts for men." She could not be dead who was visited four days in every year by the daughters of Israel, and had then such presents made her, as none could receive but one who was living.—*Romaine*.

There have been four different renderings of the hebrew text proposed, each of which is ably supported. One is, Whatsoever cometh forth, &c. shall be the Lord's, that is, devoted to him, "and I will offer him (Jehovah) a burnt-offering," that is, a sacrifice, in addition to devoting the person to the Lord's service. The word here used does not imply that sort of devotion which was accompanied by destruction of life. Jephthah's sorrow at parting with his daughter, though she were not put to death, is easily accounted for by her being his only child.

CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1—7. *The ephraimites quarrel with Jephthah, and are slain by the gileadites—Death of Jephthah.*

Jephthah was of Manasseh, and the ephraimites had the same quarrel with him as formerly with Gideon; but their resentment was vented in a more outrageous manner. Pride was at the bottom of the quarrel—only by that comes contention. Proud men think all honours lost that go beside themselves, and then who can stand before envy? Jephthah's

answer was not to be blamed, but it was not so conciliatory as Gideon's. They had been sent to, and would not come; their anger, therefore, was unreasonable. He does not take the glory of the success to himself, but gives it all to God; The Lord delivered them into mine hand. If God was pleased so far to make use of me for his glory, why should you be offended? Have you any reason to fight against me? Is not that in effect to fight against God, in whose hand I have been only an unworthy instrument? The ephraimites irritated the gileadites by abusive language. It is ill to fasten names of reproach upon persons or countries, as is common, especially upon those that lie under outward disadvantages. It often occasions quarrels that prove of ill consequence, as it did here. See likewise how mischievous an abusive tongue is, that calls ill names, and gives scurrilous language. It sets on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire of hell, Jam. 3. 6, and many a time cuts the throat of him that uses it, Psa. 64. 8, as it did here. The gileadites slew great numbers of the ephraimites, distinguishing them by their pronunciation of the hebrew word Shibboleth, which signifies "river." How far Jephthah concurred in this cruelty cannot be determined, but it was most unjustifiable, and exceedingly weakened Israel.

No contentions are so bitter as those that arise betwixt brethren or rivals for honour and precedence. What need we have to watch and pray against evil tempers! Alas, that so many Shibboleths should be invented to divide the church also; to be the watchwords for angry disputants, and the pretext for professed disciples of Christ abusing and persecuting each other! May the Lord incline all his people to follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another, Rom. 14. 19.

6. Or, forty, and two thousand; that is, 2040. On some points connected with several numbers mentioned in the historical books, see a note at the end of the book of Esther.

Ver. 8—15. *Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon judge Israel.*

We have here a short account of three more of the judges of Israel. The happiest life of individuals, and the happiest state of society, is that which affords the fewest remarkable events. To live in credit and quiet, to be peacefully useful in our circle, to possess a clear conscience,

above all—and without which nothing can avail—to enjoy communion with God our Saviour while we live, and to die at peace with God and man, forms the substance of all that a wise man can desire.

God sometimes calls men to an office without putting any remarkable work in their hand; and the days of the saints' honour or life often are but few and evil. Death's shafts fly thick; let us therefore so number our days as to apply our hearts unto wisdom.—(10.)

In the history of the judges there is no mention made of the high priest, or any other priest, or levite, appearing either for counsel or action in any public affair, from Phinehas to Eli, which may well be computed two hundred and fifty years; only the names of the high priests at that time are preserved, 1 Chron. 6. 4—7, and Ezra 7. 3—5. How can this obscurity of that priesthood for so long a time, now in the beginning of its days, agree with that mighty splendour with which it was introduced, and the figure which the institution makes in the law of Moses? Surely it intimates that the institution was intended to be typical, and that the great benefits which seemed to be promised by it, were to be chiefly looked for in its antitype, the everlasting priesthood of our Lord Jesus, in comparison of the excelling glory of which, that priesthood had no glory, 2 Cor. 3. 10.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ver. 1—7. Israel sins again, and is oppressed by the philistines—The birth of Samson announced to Manoah's wife.

At this chapter begins the history of Samson. The facts related concerning him are from first to last very surprising, and very different from those related of his predecessors. We never find him at the head, either of a court or of an army, never upon the throne of judgment, or in the field of battle, yet, in his own proper person, a great deliverer of his country, and a terrible scourge and check to its enemies and oppressors. He was an eminent believer, Heb. 11. 32, and a glorious type of Him who with his own arm wrought salvation. The history of the rest of the judges commences from their advancement to that station, but Samson's begins with his birth, nay, before, and no less than an angel from heaven announces his entrance into the world, as a pattern

of what should be afterward done to John Baptist and Christ.

Israel did evil, as they had done before in the sight of the Lord, and then God delivered them again into the hands of their enemies. The enemies God now delivered them to were the philistines, the first and chief of the nations devoted to destruction, but which God left to prove them, Judg. 3. 1, 3; an inconsiderable people, in comparison with Israel: they had but five cities of note, yet when God made use of them as the staff in his hand, they were very oppressive and vexatious. And this trouble lasted longer than any before; it continued forty years. When Israel was in this distress, Samson was born. He was of the tribe of Dan. The lot of the tribe of Dan lay next to the country of the philistines. His parents had been long childless. Many eminent persons were born of such mothers. Mercies long waited for often prove signal mercies, and it is made to appear that they were worth waiting for: by them others may be encouraged to continue their hope in God's mercy.

The glad tidings were brought to his mother that she should have a son. The messenger was an angel of the Lord, yet appearing as a man, with the aspect and garb of a prophet, or man of God. This angel was the Lord himself, that is, the Word of the Lord, who was to be the Messiah, for his name is called Wonderful, ver. 18, and Jehovah, ver. 19. The great Redeemer did in a particular manner concern himself about this typical redeemer. It was not so much for the sake of Manoah and his wife that this extraordinary message was sent, but for Israel's sake, whose deliverer he was to be.

The angel, in the message he delivers, notices her affliction. God often sends comfort to his people very seasonably, when they feel most from their troubles. Samson was born by promise, because a figure of the promised Seed, so long expected by the faith of the Old Testament saints. This deliverer of Israel must be in the strictest manner devoted to God, and an example of holiness. Notwithstanding Samson's faults we have reason to think that, being a nazirite of God's making, he exemplified not only the ceremony, but the substance of that separation to the Lord, in which the nazirite-ship did consist, Numb. 6. 2. Those who would save others, must by singular piety

distinguish themselves. Samuel, who carried on Israel's deliverance from the philistines, was a nazirite by his mother's vow, 1 Sam. 1. 11, as Samson by the Divine appointment. The mother of this deliverer must deny herself what was lawful at another time. As the promise tried her faith, so this precept tried her obedience; for God requires both from those on whom he will bestow his favours. The angel foretells the service this child should do to his country. He shall begin to deliver Israel. This intimated that the oppression of the philistines should last long, for Israel's deliverance should not begin till this child, now unborn, should be grown up. Yet he must not complete the deliverance; he shall only begin to deliver Israel, the trouble would still be prolonged. God carries on his work gradually, and by several hands. One lays the foundation of a good work, another builds, perhaps a third brings forth the top-stone.

Herein Samson was a type of Christ. 1. As a nazirite to God, a nazirite from the birth. Though our Lord Jesus was not a nazirite himself, yet he was typified by the nazirites, as being perfectly pure from all sin, not so much as conceived in it, and entirely devoted to his Father's honour. 2. As a deliverer of Israel; for he is Jesus a Saviour, who saves his people from their sins; but with this difference—Samson only began to deliver Israel; David was afterward raised up to complete the destruction of the philistines: but our Lord Jesus is both Samson and David too, both the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Manoah's wife was abundantly satisfied that the messenger was of God; his person and message she thought carried their own evidence along with them, and she inquired no further. She gave her husband a particular account both of the promise and of the precept, that he also might believe the promise, and on all occasions be a monitor to her to observe the precept. Thus should yoke-fellows communicate to each other experiences of communion with God, and their improvements in acquaintance with him, that they may be helpful to each other in the way that is holy.

Ver. 8—14. *The angel appears again, and to Manoah.*

Manoah believed what his wife told him. There was not found so great faith,

no, not in Zacharias, a priest, when waiting at the altar of the Lord, and to whom the angel himself appeared, Luke 1. 18, as was in this honest danite. Things hidden from the wise and prudent, who value themselves upon the minuteness of their inquiries, are often revealed unto babes, who know how to prize God's gifts, and to take God's word. Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet, as Manoah, have believed. His care is, what they should do to the child. Good men are more solicitous and desirous to know the duty to be done by them, than to know the events concerning them; duty is ours, events are God's. Solomon inquires concerning the good men should *do*, not the good they should *have*, Eccl. 2. 3. Manoah prays to God to send the same blessed messenger again, to give them further instructions. Those who have heard from Heaven, cannot but wish to hear more from thence, again and again to meet with the man of God. He seeks him upon his knees, prays to God to send him, and, thus seeking, finds him. Would we have God's messengers, the ministers of his gospel, to bring a word proper for us, and for our instruction? Entreat the Lord to send them to us to teach us, Rom. 15. 30, 32. God hearkened to the voice of Manoah. God will some way or other guide those by his counsel, who are sincerely desirous to know their duty, and apply to him to teach them, Psa. 25. 8, 9.

The angel appeared the second time also to the wife, when she was alone. Solitude is often a good opportunity of communion with God, believers have thought themselves never less alone than when alone, if God be with them. She did not desire this blessed messenger to go with her to her husband, but will call her husband to him. Those who would meet with God, must attend where he is pleased to manifest himself. Some read it, "this day," for "other" is not in the original, and it is probable that both these visits were the same day, and at the same place, and that the second time she sat expecting him.

Manoah, with humility, welcomes the promise, and begs the directions might be repeated. When God is pleased to bestow any mercy upon us, our great care must be how to use it well, and as we ought, because it is only a mercy indeed when it is rightly managed. God has

given us bodies, souls, estates; how shall we order them, that we may answer the intent of the Donor, and give a good account of them? Those to whom God has given children, must be very careful how they order them, and what they do unto them, that they may drive out the foolishness that is bound up in their hearts, Prov. 22. 15, form their minds and manners, and train them in the way wherein they should go. Herein pious parents will beg Divine assistance. Lord, teach us how we may order our children, that they may be nazarites, separate from the world, and living sacrifices to thee!

The angel repeats the directions he had before given. Of all that I forbade, let her beware; and all that I commanded her, let her observe. There is need of much caution and observation, for the right ordering both of ourselves and our children.

Ver. 15—23. *Manoah's sacrifice—The angel discovers himself.*

It was kindness to Manoah, that while the angel was with him, it was concealed from him that it was an angel. For had he known this, he would not have dared to converse with him as he did. He knew not that this was an angel. So Christ was in the world, and the world knew him not. We could not bear the sight of the Divine glory unveiled. God having determined to speak to us by men like ourselves, prophets and ministers, even when he spake by his angels, or by his Son, they appeared in the likeness of men, and were taken for men of God.

The angel declined to accept Manoah's offered repast, and appointed him to turn it into a sacrifice. Angels need not meat or drink; but to glorify God is their meat and drink, and it was Christ's, John 4. 34. We in some measure do the will of God as they do it, if, though we cannot live without meat and drink, we eat and drink to the glory of God, and so turn even common meals into sacrifices.

The angel declined telling him his name. God told Moses his name, Exod. 3. 13, 14, because there was occasion for his knowing it. What Manoah asked for instruction in his duty, he was readily told, ver. 12, 13; but what he asked to gratify his curiosity was denied. God has in his word given full directions concerning our duty, but never designed to answer all the inquiries of a speculative mind. He gives a reason for this re-

fusal; "It is secret," or it is wonderful, too wonderful for us. One of Christ's names is Wonderful, Isa. 9. 6. His name was long a secret, but by the gospel it is brought to light, Jesus a Saviour. Manoah must not ask, because he must not know. There are secret things which belong not to us, of which we must content ourselves to be ignorant, while in this world. We must never indulge vain curiosity in our inquiries concerning these things, Col. 2. 18. The name of our Lord is wonderful and secret, because incomprehensible; but by his wonderful works he makes himself known as far as is required for our instruction and encouragement. His chief display of himself is in the person of Jesus Christ, his co-equal Son, who, having offered on earth one sacrifice for our sins, and being risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, presents with acceptance our spiritual sacrifices, when offered through faith in his name.

The angel owned their sacrifice, and, at parting, gave them to understand who he was. Manoah, as directed, turned his meat into a meat-offering, and offered it upon a rock to the Lord, that is, he brought and laid it to be offered; "Lord, here it is, do what thou pleasest with it." Thus must we bring our hearts to God as living sacrifices, and submit them to the operation of his Spirit. The angel did wondrously. Probably, the wonder was the same with what he had done for Gideon; he made fire to come either down from heaven, or up out of the rock, to consume the sacrifice. He ascended up toward heaven in the flame of the sacrifice. By this it appeared that he was a messenger immediately from heaven. This signified God's acceptance of the offering, and intimates to what we owe the acceptance of all our offerings, even to the mediation of the Angel of the covenant, who puts much incense to the prayers of saints, and so offers them before the throne, Rev. 8. 3. Prayer is the ascent of the soul to God. But it is Christ in the heart by faith, that makes it an offering of a sweet-smelling savour: without him, our services are offensive smoke; in him, acceptable flame. We may apply it to Christ's sacrifice of himself for us; he ascended in the flame of his own offering, for by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, Heb. 9. 12.

Ever since man became a sinner, an enemy to God, every approach of the Deity has awakened terror and confusion in him. Our consciences naturally tell us that we deserve nothing but heavy tidings from the invisible world; we therefore dread every messenger from thence. Even when God comes to us in mercy, the same sentiment occurs, and sometimes leads us, like Manoah, to mistake his design, and to draw a fearful conclusion from it.—(42.)

In Manoah's reflections there is *great fear*; We shall surely die. It was an opinion general among the ancient jews, that it was present death to see God, or an angel; and this notion quite overcame his faith for the present, as it did Gideon's, ch. 6. 22. In his wife's reflection there is *great faith*. Manoah's heart began to fail; but his wife, as a help meet for him, encouraged him. Two are better than one, for if one fall into dejection and despondence, the other will help to raise him up. Yoke-fellows should piously assist each other's faith and joy, as there is occasion. None could argue better than Manoah's wife does here. Had the Lord thought fit to kill us, he would not have accepted our sacrifice, and signified his acceptance of it by turning it to ashes. (Psa. 20. 3, margin.) The sacrifice was the ransom of our lives, and the fire fastening upon that, was a plain indication of the turning away his wrath from us. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, but ours is not so. He would not have showed us all these things now, when there is little or no open vision, 1 Sam. 3. 1; nor would he have given these exceeding great and precious promises of a son, that shall be a nazirite, and a deliverer of Israel, if he had been pleased to kill us. We need not fear the withering of the roots, out of which such a branch is yet to spring.

Hereby it appears that God designs not the death of sinners, in that he has accepted the great sacrifice Christ offered up for their salvation, has put them in a way of obtaining his favour, and has assured them of it upon their repentance. Had he been pleased to kill them, he would not have done so. And let those good christians who have had communion with God in the word and prayer, to whom he has graciously manifested himself, and who have had reason to think

God has accepted their works, take encouragement from thence in a cloudy and dark day. God would not have done what he has done for my soul, if he had designed to forsake me, and leave me to perish at last; for his work is perfect, nor will he mock his people with his favours. Learn to reason as Manoah's wife; If God designed me to perish under his wrath, he would not give me such distinguishing tokens of his favour. O woman, great is thy faith.

Ver. 24, 25. *Birth of Samson.*

Here is Samson's birth and his childhood. He far outgrew other children of his age; and not in that only, but in other instances, it appeared that the Lord blessed him, qualified him both in body and mind for something great and extraordinary. Also here is his youth. When he grew up a little, the Spirit of the Lord began to move him. This was evidence that the Lord blessed him. Where God gives his blessing, he gives his Spirit to qualify for the blessing. Those are blessed indeed in whom the Spirit of grace begins to work betimes, in the days of their childhood. If the Spirit be poured out upon our offspring, they will spring up as willows by the water-courses, Isa. 44. 3, 4. The Spirit moved him at times, not at all times, but when He listed, to show that what Samson did was not from himself, for then he could have done it at any time. Strong men think themselves animated by wine, Psa. 78. 65; but Samson drank no wine, and yet excelled in strength, courage, and every thing that was bold and brave, for he had the Spirit of God moving him; therefore be not drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit.

Samson's history is famous in scripture, and the fame of him went forth among the heathen; their fables of the strength of Hercules and the locks of Nisus took their rise from the story of Samson. The grecians commonly turning all into fables, and being great pretenders to antiquity, made their own country the scene and stage of every wonderful thing, as some have well observed of them.—*Mather.*

Samson is supposed to have been contemporary with Eli.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ver. 1—4. *Samson desires a wife of the philistines.*

Samson, under the guidance of Providence, found an occasion of quarrelling

with the philistines, by joining in affinity with them. A strange method, but Samson was himself a riddle; he did that which was really great and good by that which was seemingly weak and evil. He was not designed to be a pattern to us, who must walk by rule, not by example, but a type of Him, who, though He knew no sin, was made sin for us, and appeared in the likeness of sinful flesh, that He might condemn and destroy sin in the flesh, Rom. 8. 3.

As far as the negotiation of Samson's marriage was a common case, we may observe that it was weak and foolish of him, to set his affections upon a daughter of the philistines. Shall one, not only an israelite, but a nazarete, devoted to the Lord, covet to become one with a worshipper of Dagon? Shall one, marked for a patriot, marry among the sworn enemies of his country? It does not appear that he had any reason to think her wise or virtuous, or any way likely to be a help meet for him; but he saw something in her agreeable to his fancy. He that, in the choice of a wife, is guided only by his eye, and governed by his fancy, must afterward thank himself, if he find a philistine in his arms. Yet it was well done not to proceed till he had made his parents acquainted with the matter. Herein Samson is an example to all children, conformable to the law of the fifth commandment. Children ought not to marry, nor to move towards it, without the advice and consent of their parents. Parents have a property in their children as parts of themselves. In marriage this property is transferred, for a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife. It is not only unkind and ungrateful, but very unjust, to do this without their concurrence, stealing him or her from them, who is nearer and dearer to them than their goods. Samson's parents did well to dissuade him from yoking himself thus unequally with unbelievers. Let those who profess religion, but are courting the profane and irreligious, matching into families where they have reason to think the fear of God is not, nor the worship of God, let them hear their reasoning, and apply it to themselves. Is there no israelite that pleases thee, or that thou canst think worthy of thine affection, that thou shouldest marry a philistine? In the old world, the sons of God cor-

rupted and ruined themselves, their families, and that truly primitive church, by marrying with the daughters of men, Gen. 6. 2. God had forbidden the people of Israel to marry with the devoted nations, one of which the philistines were, Deut. 7. 3. Yet this treaty of marriage is said to be "of the Lord;" not only, according to some, that God afterward overruled it to serve his designs against the philistines, but that he put it into Samson's heart to make this choice, that he might have occasion against the philistines; and that otherwise he would have yielded to his parents' dissuasions; nor would they have consented at last, if he had not satisfied them it was of the Lord. But perhaps the expression only means, that it pleased God to leave Samson to follow his own inclinations, intending in his infinite wisdom to bring out good from his misconduct, and his parents consented, because he was bent upon it. However, his example is not recorded for our imitation.

This marriage would bring him into acquaintance and converse with the philistines, by which he might be a thorn in their sides. But this circumstance does not necessarily make the action good; it may be that God only overruled the propensities of Samson to accomplish his own purposes against the oppressors of his people.—(61.)

Jesus Christ, being to deliver us from this present evil world, and to cast out the prince of it, did himself visit it, though full of pollution and enmity, and by assuming a body, did in some sense join in affinity with it, that he might destroy our spiritual enemies, and his own arm might work the salvation.

Ver. 5—9. *Samson kills a lion, and afterwards finds honey in its carcass.*

By enabling him, in a journey to Timnath, to kill a lion, God let Samson know what he could do in the strength of the Spirit of the Lord, that he might never be afraid to look the greatest difficulties in the face. Samson's encounter with the lion was hazardous. He was alone, in the vineyards, whither he had rambled from his father and mother. Children consider not how they expose themselves to the roaring lion that seeks to devour, when out of a foolish fondness for liberty, they wander from their prudent, pious parents. Nor do young people consider what lions lurk in the vineyards, the

vineyards of red wines, as dangerous as snakes under the green grass. Had Samson met with this lion in the highway, he might have had more reason to expect help both from God and man, than here in the solitary vineyards, out of his road. But there was a special providence in it, and the more hazardous the encounter the victory was the more illustrious. He had nothing in his hand. Christ engaged the roaring lion, and conquered him in the beginning of his public work, Matt. 4. 1, &c. and afterward spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them in himself, as some read it, not by any instrument. He was exalted in his own strength.

When Samson came down the next time to solemnize his nuptials, and his parents with him, he turned aside into the vineyard where he had killed the lion, perhaps, that with the sight of the place he might affect himself with the mercy of that great deliverance, and might there solemnly give thanks to God for it. It is good thus to remind ourselves of God's former favours to us. There he found the carcass of the lion; the birds or beasts of prey had eaten the flesh, and in the skeleton a swarm of bees had laid up honey, which was abundant in Canaan. Of this honey he ate himself, and he gave to his parents, and they did eat. He did not eat all himself: Hast thou found honey, eat so much as is sufficient for thee, and no more, Prov. 25. 16. He let his parents share with him. Children should be grateful to their parents with the fruits of their own industry, and so show piety at home, 1 Tim. 5. 4. Let those who by the grace of God have found sweetness in religion themselves, communicate their experience to their friends and relations, and invite them to come and share with them. He told not his parents whence he had it, lest they should have scrupled eating it. *Hall* observes here, that those are less wise and more scrupulous than Samson, that abhor the graces of God, because they find them in ill vessels. Honey is honey still, though in a dead lion. It is weak neglect not to take the honey because we hate the lion. Our Lord Jesus having conquered Satan, that roaring lion, believers find honey in the carcass, abundant strength and satisfaction, enough for themselves, and for all their friends, from that victory.

Ver. 10—20. *Samson's marriage feast—His riddle—His wife given to another.*

When Samson celebrated his marriage feast, in conformity to the custom of the country, the philistines brought him thirty companions, pretending respect, but probably placing them as a watch upon him. Samson proposed his riddle as a trial of ingenuity. The riddle in its literal purport meant no more than that he had got honey, for food and for pleasure, from the lion, which in its strength and fury was prepared to devour him. Yet this explanation may be interpreted as containing another of more importance, and more hard to be understood, except by the teaching of God. The victory of Christ over Satan, by means of his humiliation, agonies, and death, and the exaltation that followed to him, with the glory that redounded to the Father, and the spiritual advantages which thence accrue to his people, seem directly typified thereby. The entrance of sin, the fall of man, and the ruin of the human race through the malice of Satan, will issue in the deeper misery of Satan, in glory to God, and the increased happiness of the redeemed. The persecutions of the church have promoted its purity and prosperity. The trials, conflicts, and temptations of God's people, produce comfort to their souls in this world, and work for them an exceeding weight of glory in the next. The remains of indwelling sin, and even the falls of believers, become occasions to them of deeper humility, more simple dependence on the Saviour, more gratitude and ardent love for him, more compassion to others, and more fitness for service on earth, and for the occupations of the redeemed in glory. Such as abuse this sacred truth are not concerned in it: upright souls are always rendered more watchful, humble, diligent, simple, and fervent in prayer by every false step they have made. And even death, that devouring monster, being robbed of his sting, and stripped of his horror, transmits the soul to the realms of bliss. In these and other senses, out of the eater comes forth meat, and out of the strong, sweetness.

Samson's companions, when they could not expound the riddle, obliged his wife to get the exposition from him. Most inhuman was it to threaten to burn her and her relations with fire, for fear of losing each of them the value of a shirt and a

coat! The barbarity, insolence, and selfishness of their conduct illustrate the misery of Israel's bondage under such tyrants. Samson's wife, by unreasonable importunity, obtained a key to his riddle. It was on the seventh day, that is, the seventh day of the week, as Dr. Lightfoot conjectures, but the fourth day of the feast, that the companions solicited Samson's wife to entice her husband; and she did it with great art and management. A worldly wife, or a worldly friend, is to a godly man as an enemy in the camp, who will watch every opportunity to betray him. By assiduity and perseverance they, more or less, prevail over his resolutions, and induce him to make hurtful compliances. No connexion can be comfortable or lasting, where important secrets cannot be intrusted without danger of being divulged.

Samson owns they had won the wager, though he had good reason to dispute it, because they had not declared the riddle, as the bargain was, but it had been declared to them. But he only thought fit to tell them, *If ye had not ploughed with my heifer, made use of your interest with my wife, you had not found out my riddle.* Satan, in his temptations, could not do us the mischief he does, if he did not plough with the heifer of our own corrupt nature. His chief advantage against us arises from his correspondence with our deceitful hearts and inbred lusts.

Samson found himself, by immediate impulse of the Spirit of God, directed, imboldened, and assisted in an attack upon the enemies of Israel. This proved an occasion of weaning him from his new relations. He found his companions had abused him, and his wife had betrayed him; and his anger was kindled. Better be angry with philistines, than in love with them: when we join ourselves to them, we are most in danger of being ensnared. Meeting with this ill usage, he went up to his father's house. It were well for us, if the unkindnesses we meet with from the world, and our disappointments in it, had this good effect on us, to oblige us by faith and prayer to return to our heavenly Father's house, and rest there. The inconveniences that occur in our way, should make us love home, and long to be there. No sooner was he gone, than his wife was disposed of to another. See how little confidence is to be put in man. What pretence of friend-

ship soever be made, a true philistine will soon be weary of an israelite.

12. The sheets here mentioned were the large square cloths called hykes, used as a part of the dress by day, and for a covering at night: see note, *Exod. 22. 26.* It was usual to propose difficult questions or riddles, at entertainments, in ancient times.

The wager was in itself evil, being both the root and fruit of covetousness. If any one be disposed to deny that the laying of wagers is evil in *its nature*, no one, after reading this history, can doubt whether it be evil in *its tendency*.

CHAPTER XV.

Ver. 1—8. *Samson is denied his wife—He burns the corn of the philistines, and they having burned his wife and her father, he smites them with a great slaughter.*

It was generous of Samson, though the party offended, to make the first motion of reconciliation with his wife. When differences happen between relations, let those be reckoned the wisest and best who are most forward to forgive or forget injuries, and most willing to stoop and yield for the sake of peace. Her father had married her to another. Where the knowledge of God and of his law are wanting, the transactions of life will be conducted upon such principles as tend to confusion and licentiousness. Samson was conscious that he was to deliver Israel from the philistines, and a fair occasion to declare against them was afforded by their injurious treatment of him, which was a specimen of the conduct of the philistines towards the israelites. In the means which he employed we must advert to the power of God, both in supplying them and making them successful, to mortify the pride and punish the wickedness of the philistines.

We never find Samson, in any of his exploits, make use of the help of any person whatsoever. The philistines had injured Samson by their subtilty and malice, and now Samson returns the injury by subtle foxes and mischievous firebrands. By the meanness and weakness of the animals employed, he put contempt upon the enemies he fought against. The mischief he did to the philistines was very great. Instead of taking vengeance upon Samson, the philistines took vengeance for him, when he was not willing to do it for himself. See His hand in it, to whom vengeance belongs; those that deal treacherously shall be spoiled and dealt treacherously with, and the Lord is known by the judgments which he executes; especially when, as here,

he uses his people's enemies as instruments. The philistines threatened Samson's wife that they would burn her and her father's house with fire, ch. 14. 15. She, to save herself and oblige her countrymen, betrayed her husband; and the very thing that she feared, and sought, by sin, to avoid, came upon her. She and her father's house were burnt with fire, and by her countrymen, whom she sought to oblige by the wrong she did to her husband. The mischief we seek to escape by any unlawful practices, we often pull upon our own heads. He that will thus save his life shall lose it. Samson took occasion from hence to do the philistines yet a greater mischief. He smote them hip and thigh, with a great slaughter. It seems to be a phrase used to express a desperate attack. He retired to the top of the rock Etam, where he waited to see whether the philistines would be tamed by the correction he had given them.

4. The hebrew word shual denotes jackal, an animal of a species between the wolf and fox, which usually is found in packs or flocks, sometimes more than a hundred together.

The vulpinaria, or feast of the foxes, celebrated by the romans in the month of April, (the time of the jewish harvest,) in which they let loose foxes with torches fastened to their tails, was derived from the story of Samson, which was conveyed into Italy by the phœnicians.—*T. H. Horne.*

8. Or, in a hole or cave of the rock Etam.

Ver. 9—17. *Samson is bound by the men of Judah, and delivered to the philistines—He kills a thousand of them with a jaw-bone.*

Samson was basely betrayed and delivered up by the men of Judah. They that had debased themselves in the worship of their dunghill gods, Isa. 57. 9, thus debased themselves to the dust, in submission to their insulting oppressors. Sin dispirits men, nay, it infatuates them, and hides from their eyes the things that belong to their peace. They blamed him for what he had done against the philistines, as if he had done them a great injury. Thus our Lord Jesus did many good works, and for those the jews were ready to stone him! They begged that Samson would suffer them to bind him, and deliver him up to the philistines. Thus the jews delivered up our Saviour, under pretence of fear lest the romans should take away their place and nation.

Samson yielded to be bound by his countrymen, and delivered into the hands of his enraged enemies. How easily could

he have beaten off these three thousand men! but he patiently submitted, 1. That he might give an example of great meekness; as one that had rule over his own spirit, he knew how to yield, as well as how to conquer. 2. That by being delivered up to the philistines, he might have an opportunity of making a slaughter among them. 3. That he might be a type of Christ, who when he had showed what he could do in striking those down that came to seize him, yielded to be bound and led as a lamb to the slaughter. Justly is their misery prolonged, who, to oblige their worst enemies, thus abuse their best friend. Never were men so infatuated, except those who treated our blessed Saviour in like manner.

The philistines, when they had Samson among them, shouted against him. But their security and joy were a presage of their ruin. When they shouted against him, confident that he was all their own, then the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, inspired him with more than ordinary strength and resolution. When the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, his cords were loosed: where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty, and those are free indeed who are thus freed. This typified the resurrection of Christ by the power of the Spirit of holiness. In it he loosed the bands of death; and its cords, the grave-clothes, fell from his hands, without being loosed as those of Lazarus were, because it was impossible that the mighty Saviour should be holden of them; thus he triumphed over the powers of darkness that shouted against him, as if they had him sure.

Samson made great destruction among the philistines. See how poorly he was armed; he had no better weapon than the jaw-bone of an ass, and yet what execution he did with it; he never laid it out of his hand, till he had with it laid a thousand philistines dead upon the spot. To take the bone of that despicable animal, was to do wonders by the foolish things of the world, that the excellency of the power might be of God, not of man. What could be thought too hard, too much for him to do, on whom the Spirit of the Lord came mightily! Through God we shall do valiantly. It was strange the men of Judah did not come to his aid; but he was to be a type of Him that trod the wine-press alone. Samson celebrated his own victory, for

the daughters of Israel did not meet him, as afterward they did Saul. The burden of his song was, With the jaw-bone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, have I slain a thousand men.

This victory was not in the weapon, was not in the arm. It was in the Spirit of God, which moved the weapon in the arm. If the means be weak, yet God is strong. Through God we shall do great acts, yea, I can do all things through him that strengtheneth me. Seest thou a poor christian, who, by weak, feeble counsel, was enabled to overcome a temptation? There is the philistine vanquished with a sorry jaw-bone !—(34.)]

The same word in hebrew (chamor) signifies both an ass and a heap, which makes this a paronomasia, and represents the philistines falling as tamely as asses.—*Henry*.

Ver. 18—20. *His distress from thirst—God sends him a supply of water.*

After this great performance Samson was sore athirst, ver. 18. He found himself reduced to the last extremity for want of water, and ready to faint. God hereby kept him from being proud of his great strength and great achievements, and let him know that he was but a man, and liable to the calamities common to men. Josephus says, It was designed to chastise him for not making mention of God and his hand, in his memorial of the victory he had obtained, but taking all the praise to himself; I have slain a thousand men. Now that he is ready to die for thirst, he is convinced that his own arm could not have saved him, without God's right hand and arm. Providence so ordered it, that there was no water near, and he was so fatigued that he could not go far to seek it. So little notice did the men of Judah take of their deliverer, that he was ready to perish for want of a draught of water! Thus are the greatest slights often put upon those who do the greatest services. Christ, on the cross, said, I thirst. In his great contest with the enemies of our salvation he thirsted, but had no well opened for his relief, for he drank of the cup of the wrath of God for us, which Samson did not.

Samson prayed to God in this distress. Those that forget to attend God with their praises, may be compelled to attend him with their prayers. Afflictions are often sent to bring unthankful people to God. He owns himself God's servant in what he had been doing. He calls his

victory a great deliverance. He owns that it came from God, and corrects his former error, in assuming it too much to himself. Past experiences of God's power and goodness, are excellent pleas in prayer for further mercy. He pleads his being exposed to his enemies; and will it not redound to God's dishonour, if his champion become a prey to the uncircumcised? The best pleas are those taken from God's glory. God sent him seasonable relief. God clave a hollow place that was in Lehi; the place of this action was, from the jaw-bone, called Lehi. And there, in that place, whatever it was, that was so called, God caused a fountain suddenly and seasonably to open just by Samson, and water to spring up in abundance, which continued a well ever after. Of this water he drank, and his spirits revived. We should be more thankful for the mercy of water, did we consider how ill we can spare it. And this instance of Samson's relief, should encourage us to trust in God, and seek to him; for when he pleases, he can open rivers in high places. See Isa. 41. 17, 18.

Samson gave this fountain the name En-hakkore, thereby keeping in remembrance, both his own distress which occasioned him to cry, and God's favour to him, in answer to his cry. Many a spring of comfort God opens to his people, which may fitly be called by this name, it is "the well of him that cried." Samson had given a name to the place, which denoted him great and triumphant, Ramath-lehi, the lifting up of the jaw-bone; but here he gives it another name, which denotes him wanting and dependent.

Observe the continuance of Samson's government after these achievements. At length, Israel submitted to him whom they had betrayed. Now it was past dispute that God was with him, henceforward they owned him, and were directed by him as their judge; the stone which the builders refused, became the headstone. The twenty years during which he judged Israel, are said to be in the days of the philistines, which intimates their deliverance was incomplete: they had not duly repented and returned to the Lord.

CHAPTER XVI.

Ver. 1—3. *Samson enticed by a harlot—His escape from Gaza.*

Hitherto Samson's character has appeared illustrious though uncommon.

When we consider him as raised up to deliver Israel, instructed and assisted in doing it, so as best to mortify the philistines, and manifest the mighty power of God, we may vindicate most of his past conduct, and imitate much of it. Notwithstanding many infirmities, we have met with nothing inconsistent with his character as a nazarite. In this chapter we find him behaving in so wicked and infatuated a manner, that many have been led to question whether he were a godly man or not. But the apostle has determined this, Heb. 11. 32. By adverting to the doctrines and examples of scripture, the artifices of Satan, the deceitfulness of the human heart, and the methods in which the Lord frequently deals with his people, we may learn useful lessons from this history, at which some needlessly stumble, while others cavil and object.

The peculiarity of the dispensation under which Samson lived may account for many things, which, if done at this time, and without the special appointment of Heaven, would be highly criminal. And there might have been in him many exercises of piety, which, if recorded, would have reflected a different light upon his character.—(61.)

Some think Samson went to Gaza to observe the philistines, that he might get advantages against them; if so, he forgot his business, neglected that, and so fell into this snare. His sin began in his eye, and the lust which conceived, brought forth sin. Observe Samson's danger. O that all who indulge their sensual appetites in drunkenness, or any fleshly lusts, would see themselves thus surrounded, way-laid, and marked for ruin by their spiritual enemies! The faster they sleep, the more secure they feel, the greater their danger. He rose at midnight with a penitent abhorrence, we hope, of the sin he was now committing, and of himself because of it, and, we hope, with a pious resolution not to return to it; rose under an apprehension of the danger he was in. Can I be safe under this guilt? It was bad that he lay down without such checks; but it would have been worse, if he had laid still under them. He stayed not to break open the gates, but plucked up the posts, takes them, gates and bar and all, on his back several miles, up to the top of a hill, in disdain of their attempt to secure him with gates and bars, designing

thus to render himself more formidable to the philistines, and more acceptable to his people; thus to give a proof of the great strength God had given him, and as a type of Christ's victory over death and the grave. Christ not only rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, and so came forth himself, but carried away the gates of the grave, and left it, ever after, an open prison to all that are his; it shall not, it cannot always detain them. O death, where is thy sting? Where are thy gates? Thanks be to Him that not only gained a victory for himself, but giveth us the victory!

Ver. 4—17. *Delilah, bribed by the philistines, entices Samson to declare where his strength lay.*

Though Samson had been more than once brought into mischief and danger by the love of women, yet he would not take warning, but is again taken in the same snare, and this third time is fatal. The princes of the philistines soon heard of Samson's conduct, and formed a plan for his ruin. By promising Delilah about six hundred pounds sterling, they induced her to employ all her arts to find out the cause of his supernatural strength. Their terror was so great that they durst not, upon any advantage, attempt any thing against him till they were satisfied that his great strength was departed.

We may be sure this artful woman would proceed in such manner as most likely to prevail. He had some suspicion that it was with no good design that she desired to pry into this secret where his strength lay; but instead of leaving her, or giving a direct refusal, he endeavoured to amuse her by an evasive answer. He was not at first so infatuated as to disclose the secret; but he was taken in Satan's net, and was sure to become every moment more entangled. Could any thing be more weak than for him to continue with one who he so plainly saw was aiming to do him mischief? One can hardly imagine a man so perfectly besotted, and void of all consideration as Samson now was; but licentiousness is one of those things that take away the heart. This is indeed a deep pit into which many great men, and even some good men have fallen, Prov. 22. 14; 23. 27; but from which few have escaped, and they by a miracle of mercy, and with the loss of reputation and usefulness, of almost all except their souls. The anguish of their sufferings is ten thousand

times greater than all the pleasures of their sins.

Observe the discovery Samson at last made of this great secret. Delilah signifies a consumer; she was so to him. He had sacrificed his honour, conscience, interest, and every other valuable object, to his passion for her; but while he had one reserve, she would not be satisfied. Whatever a man sacrifices to such a criminal passion, still more will be required; no denial will be taken, no end to artful importunity, till a man has ruined himself, and all who are near or dear to him. She continued many days vexatious to him with her importunity, so that he had no pleasure of his life with her—why then did he not leave her? He was captivated by the power of love, falsely so called, but, truly, lust. See how she conquered him by the force of it. He told her all his heart. God left him to himself to do this foolish thing, to punish him for indulging himself in lust. The angel that foretold his birth, said nothing of his great strength; but only that he should be a nazirite, and particularly that no razor should come upon his head, ch. 13. 5. His consecration to God was to be his strength; for he was to be strengthened according to the glorious power of that Spirit which wrought in him mightily; that his strength by promise, not by nature, might be a type and figure of the spiritual strength of believers, Col. 1. 11, 29. He knew that his strength was immediately from God, who had constituted him a perpetual nazirite, of which his hair was the token; but if he renounced his nazirite's character by shaving his head, the Lord would depart from him, then he would become as other men.

13. There appears an omission here which is thus supplied in the greek version, “—and fasten them into the wall with that pin, I should be as weak as other men. So, when he went to sleep, Delilah took the seven locks of his head, and wove them with the web.” The omission may have been occasioned by the recurrence of the same word.—*Kennicott.*

Ver. 18—21. *Delilah at last overcomes Samson—The philistines take him and put out his eyes.*

See the fatal effects of false security. Satan ruins men by rocking them asleep, flattering them into a good opinion of their own safety, and so bringing them to mind nothing, and fear nothing; and then he robs them of their strength and honour, and leads them captive at his will. When we sleep our spiritual enemies do not.

The philistines took Samson when God was departed from him. Those that have thrown themselves out of God's protection, become an easy prey to their enemies. If we sleep in the lap of our lusts, we shall certainly wake in the hands of the philistines. Vain is it to expect protection or assistance from God when we are committing deliberate sin; we may think to go forth as at other times, but shall find that our strength is gone. They took an effectual course to disable him; to put out his eyes (by applying fire to them, says the arabic version). His eyes were the inlets of his sin, ver. 1, and now his punishment began there. Now the philistines had blinded him, he had time to remember how his own lust had blinded him. The best preservative of the eyes, is, to turn them away from beholding vanity. They brought him down to Gaza, that there he might appear in weakness where he had lately given such proofs of his strength, and be a jest to those to whom he had been a terror. They bound him with fetters of brass, who had before been held in the cords of his own iniquity, and he did grind in the prison, for their profit and his punishment. The devil does thus to sinners, blinds the minds of them which believe not, and so enslaves them, and secures them in his interests. Poor Samson, how art thou fallen! How is thine honour laid in the dust! How is the glory and defence of Israel become the drudge and triumph of the philistines! The crown is fallen from his head; woe unto him, for he hath sinned. Let all take warning by his fall, carefully to watch against all fleshly lusts; for all our glory is gone, and our defence departed from us, when the covenant of our separation to God, as spiritual nazarites, is profaned.

Ver. 22—31. *Samson's strength is renewed—He pulls down a building upon many of the philistines and himself.*

Samson's afflictions were the means of bringing him to deep repentance. By the loss of his bodily sight the eyes of his understanding were opened, and by depriving him of bodily strength, the Lord was pleased to renew his spiritual strength. The Lord permits a few to wander wide and sink deep, yet he recovers them at last, and marking his displeasure at sin in their severe temporal sufferings, preserves them from sinking into the pit of destruction. Hypocrites may abuse these

examples, and infidels deride them, but true christians will thereby be rendered more humble, watchful, and circumspect—more simple in their dependence on the Lord, more fervent in prayer to be kept from falling, and in praise for being preserved—and by them if they fall, be kept from sinking into despair. Such a character was Samson, and this is the interpretation of the riddle of his character.

In token of his reconciliation, his hair grew. On some feast or annual festival, the philistines renewed their triumphs over Samson; they also celebrated the triumph of Dagon, their god, over Jehovah the God of Israel. They diverted themselves by insulting over the abject situation of Samson, exercising ingenuity in making him appear contemptible. Nothing could be more grievous to so great a spirit; yet being a penitent, that makes him patient, and he accepts it as the punishment of his iniquity. How unrighteous soever the philistines were, he could not but own that God was righteous. Uncleanness is a sin that makes men vile, and exposes them to contempt. Everlasting shame and contempt will be the portion of those that are blinded and bound by their own lusts. The devil who deceived them, will insult over them.

The God of Israel justly brought sudden destruction upon them, by the hands of Samson. Thousands of the philistines were got together, to attend the sacrifices and joys of this day, but they were all slain, and buried in the ruins of the house, when they were praising Dagon their god, and giving that honour to him, which is due to God only. It was when they were making sport with an israelite, a nazarite, and insulting over him, persecuting him whom God had smitten. Nothing fills the measure of the iniquity of any person or people faster than mocking and misusing the servants of God, even though it is by their own folly that they are brought low. Those know not what they do, nor whom they affront, that make sport with a good man.

Samson pulled the house down upon them; God, no doubt, putting it into his heart, as a public person, thus to avenge God's quarrel with them, Israel's, and his own. That strength which he had lost by sin, like a true penitent, he recovers by prayer. That it was not from passion or personal revenge, but from holy zeal

for the glory of God and Israel, appears from God's accepting and answering the prayer. This was done, not by any natural strength of Samson, but by the almighty power of God, and is not only marvellous, but miraculous in our eyes. In his extraordinary case he knew that it was right he should avenge the cause of God and Israel. Nor is he to be accused of self-murder. He sought not his own death, but Israel's deliverance, and the destruction of their enemies. There is no intimation that he was impatient under his sufferings; though in accomplishing his purpose he was willing to lay down his life with them. There is a vast difference between rushing uncalled into the presence of God, out of proud impatience, rebellion, and contempt of life when it is made miserable by a man's own misconduct, and being willing to lay down life for the honour of God and the welfare of his people, though the circumstances into which a man adventures be certainly fatal.

Thus Samson died in bonds, and among the philistines, as an awful rebuke for his sins; but he died repentant, and had not his future portion with them. The effects of his death typified those of the death of Christ, who, by voluntarily laying down his life among transgressors, subverted the foundation of Satan's kingdom, and provided for the deliverance of his people. By this blow the princes of the philistines and many of their people were killed, and their power destroyed, so that they made no opposition to Samson's relations when they went to fetch his body, that it might be buried among his people—the body of Christ was given to his friends.

Great as was the sin of Samson, and justly as he merited the judgments he brought upon himself, he found mercy of the Lord at last; and every penitent shall obtain mercy, if only he flee for refuge to that Saviour whose blood cleanseth from all sin. But there is nothing in this to encourage any in the indulgence of sin, from a hope that they shall at last repent of it, and be saved.—(61.)

Samson signifies, "a little sun." According to this allusion he rose upon Israel after a suitable pre-intimation to his parents. During the morning of his life he shone very bright; towards the evening he was greatly obscured by clouds, yet when setting he burst through the gloom, and shone with more splen-

dour than ever. Jesus, the long expected "Sun of righteousness," arose upon Israel and on the earth; after shining with glorious and benign lustre during his life, he was obscured by the thickest clouds just before his setting; and when he exclaimed "It is finished," he shone forth with mild but most glorious splendour, and died a triumphant conqueror. But Christ shone far more gloriously in many respects, especially that he died praying for his murderers, and arose again to complete the redemption of his people.

There is an analogy between Christ and Samson in his sufferings, and the victoriousness against his enemies, especially in his death. Some have summed it up briefly thus:—They were both sold for money, apprehended by their enemies, led away bound, brought forth at a great feast, scorned, fastened to a post, offered themselves willingly to death, died among wicked men, and thereby destroyed the power of the enemies of the church. Many circumstances in Samson's death evidently resembled those which befell Christ. Notice these three: 1. It was voluntary—so Christ's, John 10. 18; No man taketh my life from me, I lay it down of myself. 2. That it was by his enemies. 3. That he was victorious in his death. He did suffer and conquer, yea, he conquered in and by his sufferings. He slew more at his death than in his life, Judg. 16. 30. So Christ by his death gave the most deadly blow to Satan's kingdom. In death he spoiled principalities and powers, Col. 2. 15.—(49.)

The building was probably on one side of an open area, and supported by pillars in the centre. Dr. Shaw describes buildings in the east where the removal of a pillar would have produced a similar effect. The roof and front of the building would be crowded with spectators to see Samson's feats, which he exhibited in the open area, and when allowed to rest himself, he was permitted to retire under the building, between the pillars. Sir Christopher Wren, in his *Parentalia*, describes what he considers was the construction of this building. Samson judged the south-west part of Israel. Eli was at the same time judge over the greater part of the land.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BEGINNING OF IDOLATRY IN ISRAEL.

All agree that what is related in this, and the rest of the chapters to the end of this book, was not done after Samson's time, but long before, even soon after the death of Joshua, in the days of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, ch. 20. 28. That it

might appear how happy the nation was in the Judges, here is showed how unhappy they were when there was none.

Ver. 1—6. *Micah's images, and the occasion of their being made.*

Micah and his mother quarrelled. The son robbed the mother. The old woman had hoarded, with long scraping and saving, a great sum of money, eleven hundred pieces of silver. Though it is a fault to withhold from children that which is meet, and thus lead them into temptation to wish others in their graves; yet even that will by no means excuse the wickedness of those children that steal from their parents, and think all their own, which they can get from them, though by the most indirect methods. It was the love of money that made Micah so undutiful to his mother as to rob her, and made her so unkind and void of natural affection to her son, as to curse him, if he had it and concealed it. Outward losses drive good people to their prayers, but bad people to their curses. This woman's silver was her god, before it was made either into a graven or a molten image.

Micah restored the money. He cannot believe his mother's money would do him any good, without his mother's blessing; nor dares he deny the theft when he is charged with it, or retain the money when it is demanded by the right owner. It is best not to do evil; but it is next best, when it is done, to undo it again, by repentance, confession, and restitution. Let children be afraid of having the prayers of parents against them; for though the curse causeless shall not come, yet what is justly deserved, may be justly feared, even though passionately uttered. When those that have been guilty of a fault, appear free and ingenuous in owning it, they ought to be commended for their repentance, rather than still be condemned and upbraided for their fault.

Micah and his mother agreed to turn their money into a god, and they set up idolatry in their family. This seems to have been the first instance of the revolt of any israelite from God and his instituted worship, after the death of Joshua, and the elders that out-lived him; and is therefore thus particularly related. And though this was the worship of the true God by an image, against the second commandment, it opened the door to the worship of other gods, Baalim and the

groves, against the first and great commandment. But observe how the old woman's covetousness prevailed above her superstition. She had wholly dedicated the silver to make the graven and molten image, all the eleven hundred pieces; but when it came to be done, she made less than a fifth part serve, two hundred shekels!

We read what was the corruption here introduced. The man Micah had a house of gods, a house of God, so the greek version, for so he thought it, as good as that at Shiloh, and better, because his own, of his own inventing, and at his own disposal; for people love to have their own religion, to manage it as they please. A house of error, so the chaldee, and really it was so, a deviation from the way of truth, an inlet to all deceit. Idolatry is a great cheat, and one of the worst of errors. He made teraphim, little images, with which he might advise as there was occasion, and receive informations, directions, and predictions from! Some apartment in the house of Micah was appointed for the house of God; an ephod, or holy garment, was provided for his priest to officiate in, and one of his sons he consecrated to be his priest. Here idolatry began, and it spread like a fretting leprosy.

See the cause of this corruption. There was no king in Israel. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes, and then they soon did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. Nothing contributes more, under God, to the support of religion in the world, than the due administration of those two great ordinances, magistracy and ministry.

5. Teraphim were carved images made in a human form, regarded as household deities, of which oracular inquiries were made. Those of Micah, it is supposed, were resemblances of the cherubim, and though not intended as gods, independent of, or in opposition to Jehovah, were directly contrary to the second commandment.

Ver. 7—13. *Micah hires a levite to be his priest.*

We have here an account of Micah's furnishing himself with a levite for his priest. His father was a levite, but by marriage allied to the tribe of Judah, in whose lot Bethlehem lay. We cannot suppose that a levite was constrained by want to ramble like a vagabond; this man probably was of an unsettled disposition, and rather than be under the control of the priests, he would be the priest of an idol, and at low wages. A poor salary, in comparison with what God pro-

vided for the levites that behaved well; but those that forsake God's service, will never mend themselves, nor find a better master. The ministry is the best *calling*, but the worst *trade* in the world.

See Micah's satisfaction in this; Now know I that the Lord will do me good! He hoped that his new establishment would gain reputation among his neighbours, and that would turn to his advantage, for he would share in the profits of his altar; or that God would countenance and bless him in all he put his hand unto, because he had a levite to be his priest. He thought it was a sign of God's favour to him and his images, that he had so opportunely sent a levite to his door. Thus those who please themselves with their own delusions, if Providence unexpectedly bring any thing to their hands that furthers them in their evil way, are too apt from thence to infer that God is pleased with them. He thought now that his priesthood was amended, all was well, though he still retained his images. Many deceive themselves into a good opinion of their state, by a partial reformation. They think they are as good as they should be, because, in some one particular instance, they are not so bad as they have been; as if the correcting of one fault would atone for persisting in all the rest. He thought the making a levite into a priest was a very meritorious act, which really was a presumptuous usurpation, and very provoking to God. The levite had no right to officiate as priest, nor had Micah any authority to consecrate him. Men's pride, and ignorance, and self-flattery, will undertake, not only to justify, but magnify and sanctify the most daring impieties and invasions upon the Divine prerogatives.

Blessed Saviour, thou Prince of the tribe of Levi, give us pastors after thine own heart, and let not thy faithful servants be obliged to wander to seek places, much less be content to prostitute their sacred order for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread. Make them more anxious to win souls than to gain kingdoms. Let the salvation of sinners in thy blood and righteousness be the sole object of their work, and may they labour day and night in thy word and doctrine. Do thou bless them, gracious Lord, in their ministry; and when thou, the chief Shepherd, shalt appear, may they obtain that crown of glory which fadeth not away.—(37.)

CHAPTER XVIII.

Ver. 1—6. *The danites seek to enlarge their inheritance.*

How idolatry crept into the family of Micah we read in the chapter before; how it was transferred from thence into the tribe of Dan we have an account in this chapter, and how it gained a settlement in a city of note. The tribe of Dan had their lot assigned them last of all the tribes, which being too strait for them, a considerable city in the utmost corner of Canaan northward was added to it; it was called Laish and Leishem, Josh. 19. 47. When their spies met the levite, whom they had known in his former rambles, they bethought themselves of consulting the Lord by him, in doing which they showed their ignorance to be lamentably great. The levite having gone through his form, answered them according to their inclinations, which corresponding with the event sanctioned the idolatry. Thus fortune-tellers sometimes happening to conjecture aright, all their blunders are forgotten, and their random lucky guesses raise their credit with the ignorant and credulous. In this manner God sends men a strong delusion to believe a lie, who seek information in ways prohibited in the sacred scriptures.

Ver. 7—13. *The danites examine Laish—Six hundred men sent to surprise it.*

Here is the observation which the spies made upon the city of Laish. The place was ill governed and ill guarded, which would make it a very easy prey to the first invader. They dwelt careless, quiet, and secure, because under no apprehension of danger any way; though their wickedness was so great, that they had reason to fear Divine vengeance every day. Every man might be as bad as he would, and there was no magistrate, no heir of restraint, as the word is, that might so much as put them to shame in any thing; so that by the vilest immoralities they provoked God's wrath, and by all manner of mutual mischiefs weakened and consumed one another.

We have an account of the danites' expedition against Laish. It appears, by ver. 21, that six hundred were the whole number of military men that went to settle there; but they had their families and effects with them, their little ones and cattle, so confident were they of success. The other tribes gave them a free passage through their country; their first day's

march brought them near Kirjath-jearim, and the place where they rested that night was from thence called Mahaneh-dan, the camp of Dan, and probably the place whence they began their march between Zorah and Eshtaol was called by the same name, and is meant, ch. 13. 25. The second day's march brought them to mount Ephraim, near Micah's house.

Ver. 14—26. *The danites rob Micah of his images, and persuade his levite to accompany them.*

The danites determined to take Micah's gods with them, and we are here told how they stole the images, persuaded the priest, and frightened Micah from attempting to rescue them. Oh the folly of these danites! How could they imagine those gods should protect them, that could not keep themselves from being stolen? Their idolatry began in theft. The holy God hates robbery for burnt-offerings, but the devil loves it. Had these danites seized the images, to deface and abolish them, and the priest, to punish him, they had done like israelites indeed, and had appeared jealous for their God, as their fathers had done, Josh. 22. 16; but to take them for their own use, was a complicated crime, it showed they neither feared God, nor regarded man, but were lost both to godliness and honesty.

They flattered the priest, not only to let the gods go, but to go himself along with them. A little persuasion served; his heart was glad. The proposal took well enough with his rambling fancy, and gratified his covetousness and ambition. What better could be expected from a treacherous levite? what house can be sure of him who has forsaken the house of the Lord? Or what friend will he be true to, that has been false to his God? The hireling flees because he is a hireling.

Micah insisted upon the wrong they had done him, ver. 24. "Ye have taken away my gods, my images of God, which I have such an incontestable title to, for I made them myself; and which I have such an affection for, that I am undone if I lose them; for what have I more that will do me any good, if these be gone?" This discovers to us the folly of idolaters, and the power that Satan has over them. What a folly was it for him to call those his gods, which he had made, when He only is to be worshipped by us as God, that made us! This may discover to us our spiritual idolatry; that creature which

we place our happiness in, upon which we set our affections inordinately, and which we can by no means find in our hearts to part with, of which we say, What have we more?—that we make an idol of. That is put in God's place, and is a usurper, which we are concerned about, as if our life and comfort, our hope, and happiness, and all, were bound up in it. But if people will thus walk in the name of their god, shall we not be in like manner affected towards our God, the true God? Let us reckon an interest in God, and communion with him, incomparably the richest portion, and the loss of God the sorest loss. Woe unto us if we depart, for what have we more?

Micah has not courage enough to venture his life for the rescue of his gods, so little opinion had he of their being able to protect him, therefore he gives them up. If the loss of his idols convinced him of their vanity and impotence, and his own folly in setting his heart upon them, and sent him back to the true God from whom he had revolted, he that lost them had a much better bargain than they that by force of arms carried them off. If the loss of our idols cure us of the love of them, and make us say, What have we to do any more with idols? the loss will be unspeakable gain: see Isa. 2. 20; 30. 22.

Ver. 27—31. *The danites take Laish, and set up idolatry.*

The danites proceeded on their march to Laish. They put all the people to the sword, and burnt down so much of the city as they thought fit to rebuild, and, for aught that appears herein, they met with no resistance; the measure of the iniquity of the canaanites was full, that of the danites was but beginning to fill. Idolatry was immediately set up there! As soon as they began to settle themselves, they set up the graven image, perversely attributing their success to that idol, which, if God had not been infinitely patient, would have been their ruin. Thus a prosperous idolater goes on to offend, imputing this his power unto his god, Hab. 1. 11. Their levite, who officiated as priest, is named here, Jonathan. How long these corruptions continued, we are told in the close; that the posterity of this Jonathan continued to act as priests to this family of Dan, which was seated at Laish, and in the country about, till the captivity—that of the ark by the philis-

tines in the early days of Samuel. These images continued till Samuel's time, for so long the ark of God was at Shiloh; and, it is probable, in his time effectual care was taken to suppress and abolish this idolatry. Jeroboam set up one of his golden calves in this city.

30. Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the grandson of Moses. The massorite doctors, to hide this disgrace to the memory of Moses, interpolated the letter N, thus changing it to Manasses. —*Hales*. This is acknowledged by *Kimchi*, and various jewish learned writers.

The last five chapters of the book of Judges contain many particulars which are illustrated by a knowledge of the manners of ancient times, and the customs of the east at the present day.

CHAPTER XIX.

The wickedness of the men of Gibeah.

The three remaining chapters of this book contain a most tragical history of the wickedness of the men of Gibeah, in Benjamin, who were supported by the whole tribe, for which that tribe was severely chastised, and almost entirely cut off by the rest of the tribes. This seems to have been done not long after the death of Joshua, for it was when there was no king, no judge in Israel, ver. 1, and ch. 21. 25, and Phinehas was then high priest, ch. 20. 28. These iniquities, the danites' idolatry and the benjamites' immorality, let in that general apostasy, ch. 3. 7.

Here is very particularly related the abuse of a levite's concubine, her elopement from him, the journey he took to fetch her home, his reconciliation to her, and her father's kind entertainment of him; the neglect he experienced at Gibeah, where he rested for the night, and was entertained by an ephraimite who sojourned among them; the wicked behaviour of the people of Gibeah, which ended in the woman's death, and the course followed by the levite to excite the rest of Israel to punish this wickedness.

The righteous Lord permits sinners to execute just vengeance upon one another, and if the scene here described is horrible, what will be the discoveries of the day of judgment? What gratitude we owe to the Lord for the restraints of his providence, and the influences of his grace! Let each of us consider how to escape from the wrath to come, how to mortify the sins of our own hearts, to resist Satan's temptations, and to avoid the pollutions there are in the world.

CHAPTER XX.

The men of Gibeah are supported by the benjamites—The tribe of Benjamin nearly extirpated by the rest of the israelites.

This chapter relates how the levite's cause was heard in a convention of Israel; their determination to avenge his quarrel; their demand for the benjamites to deliver up the inhabitants of Gibeah. The benjamites refuse and prepare for war. The israelites are defeated in two battles with great loss. Their success after having humbled themselves before the Lord, and the almost total extirpation of the benjamites are also related.

Their abhorrence of the crime committed at Gibeah, and the determination to punish the criminals, were very proper; but they formed their resolves with too much precipitation and self-confidence. Deep humiliation, and lamentation that such wickedness had been wrought in Israel, were called for, as well as indignation against the criminals. Going forth to battle under the guilt of their own sins, confiding in their superior numbers, and elated with self-preference, the israelites met at first with severe rebukes, and the benjamites were employed to chastise them before they executed the vengeance of God upon the benjamites, for their more atrocious wickedness. These observations may help to explain how it was that the israelites, with so good a cause, should meet with such disasters. Frequently we cannot discern the reasons of God's dispensations; but in this case his wisdom and justice are easily perceived by the attentive mind. We ought carefully to watch over our own spirits, and to pray continually to be kept from unhallowed zeal in the work of God, and above all to depend upon the atoning blood of Christ for the forgiveness and acceptance of our best services. How will they escape who neglect so great salvation? And all who patronize and delight in the workers of iniquity will, as accomplices, share their awful doom. From this condemnation may we be delivered.

The eternal ruin of souls will be worse, and more fearful, than these desolations of a tribe. This affair of Gibeah is twice spoken of by the prophet Hosea, as the beginning of the corruption of Israel, and a pattern to all that followed, ch. 9. 9, "They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah;" and ch. 10. 9, "Thou hast sinned from the days of Gi-

beah:" it is added, that the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not, that is, did not at first, overtake them.

47. The rock Rimmon is the most elevated summit of the ridge called the mountains of Israel or Ephraim, which are situated in the centre of the Holy Land. It is now called Quarantania, and is supposed to have been the place where the Saviour was tempted, Matt. 4. 8.

CHAPTER XXI.

The israelites lament for the benjamites, and their utter extirpation prevented.

This chapter contains the lamentation of Israel for the benjamites, and their perplexity through the oath they had taken not to give their daughters to them in marriage. The inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead being destroyed for not coming to Mizpeh to assist against Benjamin, the survivors of that tribe are provided with wives from some of the daughters of Jabesh-Gilead, and some daughters of Shiloh. When the passions are violently excited, measures appear necessary which afterwards are perceived to be unlawful. Thus the israelites brought themselves needlessly into great perplexities, and at last evaded the vow by mere artifice.

They that had spared the canaanites in many places, who were devoted to destruction by the Divine command, could not find in their hearts to spare their brethren that were devoted by their own curse! Why they did not send men to root the jebusites out of Jerusalem, to avoid whom the poor levite had been forced to go to Gibeah? ch. 19. 11, 12. Men are commonly more zealous to support their own authority than that of God. Surely a slighter punishment might have sufficed, and enough of the blood of Israel had already been shed. They would have acted better if they had repented of their rash oaths, brought sin-offerings, and sought forgiveness in the appointed way, than thus to attempt to avoid the guilt of perjury by actions equally unjustifiable. That men can be so absurd as to advise others to acts of treachery or violence, and to counsel them therein, out of a sense of duty, forms a striking proof of the blindness of the human mind when left to itself, and of the fatal effects of an ignorant or erroneous conscience.

May a gracious God be pleased to follow up his own gracious designs in recording the sad relations of Israel in this book, to

make us wise, under the Divine teaching, from what is written. If the page of Israel's transgressions in this book of the Judges be blessed of God the Holy Ghost, so as to prompt our hearts to behold in it, what it really is, the history of all men according to nature and unrestrained by grace; and if the whole tends to endear the Saviour, in all his person, work, relations, and characters, as the only remedy for man; and if our hearts are led to Him

for salvation—then let us bless the great Author of all our mercies who hath given this, as well as all scripture, by inspiration of God, and made it profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.—(37.)

20, 21. Ambushes of evil spirits carry away many a soul from dances to a fearful desolation.—*Hall.*

THE BOOK OF RUTH.

This short book forms an appendix to the book of Judges, and is an introduction to the ensuing history. It contains many particulars concerning the family of Elimelech, and informs us in what manner Ruth, a moabitess, became the wife of Boaz, and an ancestor of David and of Christ. The chief events took place at Bethlehem, afterwards the city of David, whose genealogy concludes the book, and they must have occurred early in the time of the Judges. Many events have happened which perhaps we might think as well worthy to be recorded, but God saw fit only to transmit the knowledge of these to us. It is probable that Samuel was the penman of it.

We find in this book excellent examples of faith, piety, patience, humility, industry, and loving-kindness, in the ordinary occurrences of life. Also intimations of the special care which God's providence takes of our most minute concerns, encouraging us to entire confidence therein. We may view this book, as *Hunter* observes, as a beautiful, because natural representation of human life; as a curious and interesting detail of important facts; and as an essential part of the plan of redemption.

Herein also is figuratively set forth the state of the church, which is subject to manifold afflictions, and yet at length God giveth a good and joyful issue, teaching us to abide with patience till God deliver us out of troubles. Herein also is described how Jesus Christ (who according to the flesh came of David) proceeded of Ruth, of whom the Lord Jesus vouchsafed to come, notwithstanding she was a moabite and a stranger from the people of God, declaring unto us thereby that the gentiles should be sanctified by him, and joined with his people, and that there should be but one sheepfold and one Shepherd: thus making manifest the condescending love of the Saviour in assuming the likeness of sinful flesh, and bringing the gentiles into the closest union with himself, enriching us with all his unsearchable riches; these should bind our hearts to his service, and constrain us to live to his glory.

In the ancient Jewish canon of the scriptures, Judges and Ruth formed but one book. Various conjectures have been made as to the period in the times of the Judges when the events here narrated occurred, but the most probable appears to be that which places it during the judicature of Gideon, though it is usually dated rather earlier. There is perhaps no history that has been wrought into so many different forms, transfused into so many different languages, and accommodated to so many situations as the history of Ruth.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1—5. *Elimelech and his sons, driven by famine to the land of Moab, die there.*

HERE is a famine in the land of Canaan, that land flowing with milk and honey! This was one of the judgments God had threatened to bring upon the Jews for their sins, Lev. 26. 19, 20. They were oppressed by their enemies; and as they were not reformed by that judgment, God sent this. When the land had rest, yet it had not plenty; even in Bethlehem, which signifies the house of bread, there was scarcity. A fruitful land is turned into barrenness, to correct and restrain the luxury and wantonness of them that dwell therein. An account is given of

one particular family distressed in the famine, and the removal of this family from Bethlehem into the country of Moab, on the other side Jordan, because of the famine, ver. 1, 2. It seems there was plenty in the country of Moab, when there was scarcity in the land of Israel. Common gifts of providence are often bestowed in greater plenty upon those who are strangers to God, than upon those who know and worship him. Thither Elimelech goes to sojourn, as Abraham, on the like occasion, went into Egypt, and Isaac into the land of the Philistines.

Elimelech's care to provide for his family, was, without doubt, commendable.

If any provide not for his own, he hath denied the faith, 1 Tim. 5. 8. But removal into the country of Moab, upon this occasion, could hardly be justified. Abraham and Isaac were only sojourners in Canaan; but the seed of Israel were now fixed, and ought not to remove into the territories of the heathen. The famine was not so extreme but others could endure it. The removal ended in the impoverishing and wasting of his family. He dishonoured God by it, and the good land he had given them, weakened the hands of his brethren, with whom he should have been willing to take his lot, and set an ill example to others. It is evidence of a discontented, distrustful, unstable spirit, to be weary of the place in which God has set us, and to be for leaving it, whenever we meet with any uneasiness or inconvenience in it. It is folly to think of escaping that cross, which, being laid in our way, we ought to take up. It is seldom that changing our place is mending it. Or, if Elimelech would remove, why not to the tribes of Israel on the other side Jordan, that bordered on the land of Moab? If he had that zeal for God and his worship, and that affection for his brethren, which became an israelite, he would not have persuaded himself to sojourn among moabites.

Two of his sons married two of the daughters of Moab after his death: this was the consequence of his bringing them away from the people of God, and leading them into acquaintance with the women of Moab. Those that bring young people into bad acquaintance, and take them out of the way of public ordinances, though they may think them well-principled, and armed against temptation, know not what will be the end thereof. It does not appear that the women they married were proselyted to the jewish religion, for Orpah is said to have returned to her gods; the gods of Moab were hers still. Naomi's husband died; and her two sons soon after their marriage: and the chaldee says, Their days were shortened, because they transgressed the law in marrying strange wives. See here, 1. That wherever we go, we cannot outrun death, whose fatal arrows fly in all places. 2. That we cannot expect to prosper when we go out of the way of our duty. He that will save his life by indirect courses, shall lose it. 3. That death,

when it comes into a family, often makes breach upon breach. One is taken away, to prepare another to follow soon after; one is taken away, and that affliction is not duly improved, therefore God sends another of the same kind.

Earthly trials or enjoyments are of short continuance. Death is continually removing those of every age and situation; breaking in upon the most endearing unions as soon as formed, and marring all our outward comforts: we cannot too decidedly prefer those advantages which shall endure for ever; that we may be ready for every separating stroke.

Ver. 6—14. *Naomi returns home—She dissuades her daughters-in-law from accompanying her.*

Naomi was encouraged to return to her own land by hearing that the Lord had visited it with greater plenty. Her new alliances in the country of Moab, could not make her forget her relation to the land of Israel. Though there be a reason for our being in bad places, yet when the reason ceases, we must by no means continue in them. Forced absence from God's ordinances, and forced presence with wicked people, are great afflictions; but when continued of choice, then it becomes sin. She began to think of returning immediately upon the death of her two sons. When death comes into a family, it ought to be improved for reforming what is amiss in the family: when relations are taken away from us, we are put upon inquiry, whether, in some instance or other, we are not out of the way of our duty, that we may return to it. God calls our sins to remembrance when he slays a son, 1 Kings 17. 18. And if thus he hedge up our way with thorns, it is that he may oblige us to say, We will go and return to our first Husband, as Naomi here to her country, Hos. 2. 7. God takes away from us the comforts we stay ourselves too much upon, and solace ourselves too much in, here, in the land of our sojourning, that we may think more of our home in the other world, and by faith and hope hasten towards it. Earth is embittered to us, that heaven may be endeared.

Naomi seems to have been a person of faith and piety, and to have instructed her daughters in the true religion, which she recommended by her example. They both had great affection for her, and proposed to go into the land of Israel with

her, notwithstanding her afflicted condition. It was a sign they had dwelt together in unity. Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are often at variance, therefore it is the more commendable if they live in love. Let all in that relation aim at the praise of doing so. When they had gone a little way with her, Naomi, with a great deal of affection, urged them to go back. Naomi suggests that their own mothers would be more agreeable to them than a mother-in-law; especially when their own mothers had houses, and their mother-in-law had not a place to lay her head in. She dismisses them with commendation. While we are together, we should labour so to conduct ourselves, as that when we part, we may not have cause to reflect with regret upon what has passed in the relation. She dismisses them with prayer. It is very proper for friends, when they part, to part with prayer. In this blessing, she twice mentions the name Jehovah, Israel's God, and the only true God; directing her daughters to look up to him as the only Fountain of all good. To him she prays that he would recompense to them the kindness they had showed to her and hers. It may be expected and prayed for in faith, that God will deal kindly with those who have dealt kindly with their relations. He that watereth, shall be watered also himself. And that they might be happy in marrying again. If any content and satisfaction be found in our outward condition, God must be acknowledged in it. She dismissed them with affection. If relations must part, let them thus part in love, that they may, if they never meet again in this world, meet in the world of everlasting love.

The life of married persons, meeting together in the fear of God, is "rest." How then comes it to pass that so many find it otherwise? Who can hinder it, if men turn to their undoing those things which should be for their strength and ornament? The estate of matrimony is not to be therefore blamed, but the folly of such as undertake it out of some sinister end. If grace and piety were principally respected in the choice, it would be found that a married life is *rest*. Man and wife should agree by their counsel to and prayers for each other, to assist mutually against their weaknesses and infirmities, which otherwise would turn

the *rest* of their life into unquietness.—(24.)

The two young widows could not think of parting with their good mother-in-law, so much had the conversation of that pious israelite won upon them. They not only wept, as loth to part, but they professed a resolution to adhere to her. It is a rare instance of affection to a mother-in-law, and evidences that they had, for her sake, conceived a good opinion of the people of Israel. Even Orpah, who afterward went back to her gods, now seemed resolved to go with Naomi; but strong passions, without a settled judgment, commonly produce weak resolutions. Naomi still dissuaded them from going with her. She had no sons, nor thought of any near kinsman, likely to do the kinsman's part. Yet this was not all, she knew not how to maintain them like themselves. The greatest grievance of that poor condition to which she was reduced, was, that she was not in a capacity to do for them as she would. It grieveth me more for your sakes, than for my own, that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me. She judges herself chiefly aimed at in the affliction; that God's quarrel was principally with her, The hand of the Lord is gone out *against me*. She was the sinner, but they were the sufferers. It grieveth me much for your sakes. A gracious, generous spirit, can better bear its own burden, than it can bear to see itself a grievance to others, or others any way drawn into trouble by it. Naomi could more easily want herself, than see her daughters want.

Did Naomi do well, thus to discourage her daughters from going with her, when, by taking them with her, she might save them from the idolatry of Moab, and bring them to the faith and worship of the God of Israel? Naomi, no doubt, desired to do that. But if they came with her, she would not have them to come upon her account; those that take upon them a profession of religion, only in complaisance to their relations, to oblige their friends, or for the sake of company, will be converts of small value and of short continuance. If they did come with her, she would have them make it their deliberate choice, and sit down first and count the cost, as it concerns those to do that take up a profession of religion. It is good for us to be

told the worst; our Saviour took this course with him who, in the heat of zeal, spoke that bold word, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest, Matt. 8. 19. And more desire "rest in the house of a husband," or some worldly settlement or earthly satisfaction, than that rest to which Christ invites our souls; therefore upon trial they will depart from Christ, though perhaps sorrowful and reluctant.

Ver. 15—18. *Orpah stays with her own people, but Ruth cleaves to Naomi.*

Let us read in Orpah's fall a lecture of our own infirmity. For if we stand, it is not because we have more might in ourselves, but because God hath more mercy upon us.—(24.)

Orpah yielded to her own corrupt inclination, and went back. Ruth was steadfast. They were both much affected with the tender things that Naomi had said, but to Orpah it was a savour of death unto death. The representation Naomi made of the inconveniences they must count upon, if they went forward to Canaan, sent her back to the country of Moab, and served her as an excuse for her apostasy. On the contrary, it strengthened Ruth's resolution, and her good affection to Naomi. Orpah also showed affection for Naomi, and was loth to part from her; yet she did not love her well enough to leave Moab for her sake. Thus, many have a value and affection for Christ, yet come short of salvation by him, because they cannot find in their hearts to forsake other things for him. They love him, yet leave him, because they do not love him enough, but love other things better. Thus the young man that went away from Christ, went away sorrowful, Matt. 19. 22. But "Ruth clave unto her," and ended the debate, by a most solemn profession of an immovable resolution never to forsake Naomi, nor to return to her own country and her own relations again. She seems to have had another spirit and another speech, when her sister was gone, and it is an instance of the grace of God inclining the soul to the resolute choice of the better part. Draw us thus, and we will run after thee. Her mother's dissuasions made her the more resolute. She begs of her mother-in-law to say no more against her going. It is great vexation and uneasiness to those who are resolved for God and religion, to be tempted and

solicited to alter their resolution. The margin reads, Be not against me. We are to reckon those against us, and really our enemies, that would hinder us in our way to the heavenly Canaan. Our relations they may be, but they cannot be our friends, who would dissuade us from, and discourage us in the service of God and the work of religion.

Ruth is very particular in her resolution to cleave to Naomi, and never to forsake her. She is a pattern of a resolute convert to God and religion—thus must we be at a point. 1. We must take the Lord for our God. This God is my God for ever and ever, I declare him to be mine. 2. When we take God for our God, we must take his people for our people in all conditions; though they are a poor, despised people, yet if they are his, they must be ours. 3. Having cast in our lot among them, we must be willing to take our lot with them, and to fare as they fare. We must submit to the same yoke, and draw in it faithfully, take up the same cross, and carry it cheerfully, go where God would have us to go, though it should be into banishment, and lodge where he would have us to lodge, though it be in a prison; die where he will have us die, and lay our bones in the graves of the upright, who enter into peace, and rest in their beds, though they are but the graves of the common people. 4. We must resolve to continue and persevere; and herein our adherence to Christ must be closer than that of Ruth to Naomi. She resolved that nothing but death should separate them; but we must resolve that death itself shall not separate us from our duty to Christ, then we may be sure that death itself shall not separate us from our happiness in Christ. 5. We must bind our souls never to break these pious resolutions, but that we will cleave to the Lord. He that means honestly, starts not at assurances.

Naomi could desire no more than the solemn protestation Ruth made. See the power of resolution; it silences temptation. Those that are unresolved, and go in religious ways without a steadfast mind, tempt the tempter, and stand like a door half-open, which invites a thief; but resolution shuts and bolts the door, resists the devil and forces him to flee.

Ver. 19—22. *Naomi and Ruth come to Bethlehem.*

The history is silent on the anxieties,

fatigues, and sufferings of the journey. God brings them at last to their desired resting-place. Thirteen hundred years after this period a still more illustrious traveller approached this, her native city, not to take possession of the inheritance of her fathers, but to feel the bitterness of unkindness and neglect; friendless and poor in a most trying hour. She brought forth her first-born son in a stable, and laid him in a manger! But through these circumstances of meanness and poverty was a display of Almighty glory and power prepared. How important the annals of these poor women in the history of mankind! what celebrity they have conferred on Bethlehem!—(39.)

Naomi and Ruth came to Bethlehem. All the city was moved about them. She had formerly lived respectably, else there had not been so much notice taken of her. Those with whom she had formerly been intimate, were surprised to see her in this condition; so much broken and altered with her afflictions, that they could scarcely think this was the same person. Afflictions will make great and surprising changes in a little time. When we see how sickness and old age alter people, change their countenance and temper, we may think of what the bethlehemites said, Is this Naomi? One would not take her to be the same person. God, by his grace, fit us for all such changes, especially the great change!

Remark the composure of Naomi. She said, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara. Naomi signifies pleasant or amiable; Mara, bitter, or bitterness. She was now a woman of a sorrowful spirit. Thus does she bring her mind to her condition, which we all ought to do, when our condition is not in every thing to our mind. The change of her state is described without any passionate murmurings or complaints. She went out full; she had her husband with her, and two sons. Much of the fulness of our comfort in this world, arises from relations. But she now came home again empty, poor, a widow, and childless. So uncertain is all that we call fulness in the creature, 1 Sam. 2. 5. Even in the fulness of that sufficiency we may be in straits. But there is a fulness of which we never can be emptied; a good part which shall not be taken from those who have it. She acknowledged the hand of God, his mighty hand, in the affliction.

Nothing conduces more to satisfy a gracious soul under an affliction, than the consideration of the hand of God in it. Especially to consider, that he who afflicts us, is Shaddai, the Almighty, to whom it is our duty and interest to submit. He afflicts as a God in covenant, and his all-sufficiency may be our support and supply under all our afflictions. She speaks very feelingly of the impression affliction had made upon her. The cup of affliction is a "bitter" cup, and even that which afterward yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness, yet, for the present, is not joyous, but grievous, Heb. 12. 11. She owns the affliction to come from God. The Lord hath testified against me. When God corrects us, he testifies against us, and contends with us, Job 10. 17, intimating he is displeased with us. Every rod has a voice, the voice of a witness. She accommodates herself to the dispensation, and is willing to be called Mara, bitter. It well becomes us to have our hearts humbled under humbling providences. Our troubles are sanctified to us, when we thus comport with them; it is not the affliction itself, but the affliction rightly borne, that does us good.

This account of Naomi reminds us that believers must aim to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things; in every situation and relation in life, especially amongst such as are strangers to the truth, or prejudiced against it. When they thus conduct themselves, they win much upon others, and render them more disposed to take in good part their endeavours to benefit their souls. Besides the comfort of domestic harmony, the Lord will bless such a conduct to be the means of bringing those who were ignorant, careless, or prejudiced, to inquire after his truth and salvation; while the contrary behaviour of many professors prejudices the minds of thousands against true religion.

22. Barley harvest in Judea usually began in the month of Nisan, corresponding with April.

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1—3. *Ruth gleanes in the fields of Boaz.*

When Naomi and Ruth were settled in some homely abode at Bethlehem, the latter, expecting nothing in Canaan but a life of hard labour and mean fare, proposed to go and glean in some field, for the support of herself and her mother-in-law

The Lord intended other things for her; but he was pleased to prove in this manner her sincerity, humility, industry, and patience; and her affection to Naomi for his sake. Here is an instance to show that the distinctions we form in our narrow minds concerning what is little or great, mean or important, in the persons and affairs of men, widely differ from the judgment of the Lord. The gleanings of a poor Moabitess, who trusted in him, is deemed more worthy of his condescending notice than the transactions of the greatest princes then living, which have been consigned to oblivion! Honest industry, humble patience, and willingness to labour for relations or benefactors who are unable to provide for themselves, are honourable and acceptable to God.

Observe Ruth's humility. When Providence had made her poor, she cheerfully stoops to the meanness of her circumstances, and accommodates herself to her lot. High spirits will rather starve than stoop; Ruth was none of these. Nay, it is her own proposal, not her mother's injunction. Humility is one of the brightest ornaments of youth. Before Ruth's honour, was this humility. Observe, how humbly she speaks, in her expectation of leave to glean. Poor people must not demand kindness as a debt, but ask, and take it as a favour, though in a small matter.

Ruth also was an example of industry. She was one of the virtuous women who love not to eat the bread of idleness. This is an example to young people, let them learn betimes to labour, and do with all their might what their hand finds to do. A disposition to diligence promises well, both for this world and the other. We must not be shy of any honest employment, though it be thought mean by some. No labour is a reproach. Sin is a thing below us, but we must not think any thing else so to which Providence calls us. She was an example of regard to her mother, and of dependence upon Providence. She trusts Providence to raise her up some friend or other who will be kind to her. And God did well for Ruth; for when she went out, without guide or companion, she went to the field of Boaz. To her it seemed casual; she knew not whose field it was, nor had she any reason for going to that more than any other; therefore it is said to be her hap; but Providence directed her steps to

this field. God wisely orders what seem to us small events; and those that appear altogether contingent, serve his own glory, and the good of his people. Many a great affair is brought about by a little turn, which seemed by chance to us, but was directed by Providence with design.

Ver. 4—16. *The kindness of Boaz to Ruth.*

The name of Boaz signifies "strength is in him," and he was a man of wealth. The pious and kind language interchanged between him and his reapers, appears to have been familiar to them, and induces us to hope there were many godly persons in Israel, notwithstanding their frequent national apostasies. Such language as this, alas, is seldom heard in our fields while the harvest is gathering in; too often the reverse—what is immoral and corrupt. A stranger would form a very different opinion of our land, from that which Ruth would form of Israel from the converse and conduct of Boaz and his reapers. But true religion will teach a man to behave with propriety in every circumstance and relation of life; it will form kind masters, and faithful servants, and produce harmony in families. True religion will produce mutual love and kindness among persons of different ranks; it will engage the rich to be condescending and kind, and the poor to humble and respectful behaviour to their superiors and benefactors; it will express itself in prayer and praise. It had these effects on Boaz and his men.

When he came to them, he prayed for them; The Lord be with you, prosper you, and give you health and strength, and preserve you from any disaster. They did not, as soon as he was out of hearing, curse him, as some ill-natured servants that hate their master's eye, but they returned his courtesy; The Lord bless thee, and make our labours serviceable to thy prosperity! Things are likely to go on well where there is such good-will as this between masters and servants. They expressed their kindness to each other by praying one for another. Let us from hence learn to use courteous salutations and pious ejaculations, lifting up our hearts to God for his favour, in such short prayers as these. Only, we must take heed that they do not degenerate into formality, lest in them we take the name of the Lord our God in vain; but if we are serious in them, we may in them keep up our communion with God, and fetch

in mercy and grace from him. It appears to have been the usual custom to wish reapers good speed, *Psa.* 129. 7, 8.

Boaz inquired concerning the stranger he saw, and gave orders that they should not touch her, nor reproach her. Masters must take care, not only that they do no hurt themselves, but that they suffer not their servants and those under them to do hurt. He ordered them to be kind to her, and to let fall some handfuls on purpose for her. Though it is fit that masters should restrain and rebuke their servants' wastefulness, yet they should not tie them up from being properly charitable. Thus Boaz was very kind to Ruth, and showed her favour, induced to it by the account he had of her, and what he observed concerning her, God also inclining his heart to countenance her. Servants should be just in the character and reports they give to their masters, and take heed they do not misrepresent any person, nor without cause discourage their master's charity.

Boaz prayed for her—The Lord recompense thy work. Her strong affection to the commonwealth of Israel, to which she was by birth an alien, was a work of the Divine grace in her, which would certainly be crowned with a full reward by him under whose wings she was come to trust. Those who by faith come under the wings of Divine grace, and have full confidence in that grace, may be sure of a full recompence of reward for their so doing. From this expression, the jews describe a proselyte to be one that is gathered under the wings of the Divine Majesty. He encouraged her to go on gleaning, and did not offer to take her from that. The greatest kindness we can do our poor relations is to assist and encourage their industry. Boaz ordered his servants to let her glean among the sheaves, where other gleaners were not allowed to come, and not to suspect her of taking more than was allowed her. All this shows Boaz to be a man of a generous spirit, and one that, according to the law, considered the heart of a stranger.

Ruth received these favours with humility and gratitude, and conducted herself with as much propriety in her place as Boaz did in his, little thinking that she should shortly be the mistress of the field she was now gleaning in. She gave him honour, according to the usage of the country. We must render honour to

whom honour is due. She humbly owned herself unworthy of his favours, seeing she was a stranger. That is, not an israelite, but a heathen, born and brought up a moabite, unworthy the regard, and unmeet for the society of the people of God, even that of the handmaidens, the poorest among them. It well becomes us all to think meanly of ourselves, and to take notice of that in ourselves which is diminishing, esteeming others better than ourselves. She gratefully acknowledged his kindness; though it was no great expense to him, nor much more than what he was obliged to by the Divine law. She begs the continuance of his good-will, and owns that what he had said had been a cordial to her. Those who are in high places know not how much good they may do to inferiors with a kind look, or by speaking in a friendly manner to them; so small an expense, one would think, they should not grudge. When Boaz gave Ruth her dinner with his reapers, she ate only so much as would suffice her, and left the rest, and immediately rose up to glean. Temperance is a friend to industry; and we must eat and drink to strengthen ourselves for business, not to indispose us to it.

Let us, in the kindness of Boaz to Ruth, contemplate the kindness of the Lord Jesus Christ to poor sinners, to whose meanness he most freely condescends, on whom, though most unworthy, he liberally confers his benefits, whom he neither upbraids, nor suffers others to upbraid.

14. Vinegar, or a kind of weak wine, such as is commonly drank in wine countries.

Ver. 17—23. *Ruth returns to her mother-in-law.*

Ruth took care not to lose time; she gleaned until evening. She scarcely used, much less did she abuse the kindness of Boaz. She took care not to lose what she had gathered, but threshed it herself, that she might the more easily carry it home, and have it ready for use. Ruth had gathered it ear by ear, but when all put together, it was an ephah of barley, about four pecks. It is an encouragement to industry, that in all labour, even that of gleaning, there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury, *Prov.* 14. 23. She did not think it too hard or too mean a service to carry her corn herself, but was pleased with what she had gotten by her own industry, and careful to secure it. Let us thus take care that we lose not those things which we have

wrought, which we have gained, 2 John 8. Ruth went straight home to her mother-in-law, and did not go to converse with the servants of Boaz. She entertained Naomi with what she had left of the dinner Boaz had given her. If she had any thing better than common, her mother should have part with her. Thus, having showed industry abroad, she showed piety at home; so children's maintaining of their parents is called, 1 Tim. 5. 4, and it is part of the honour due to them by the fifth commandment, Matt. 15. 6.

Naomi asked where she had been?—Parents should inquire into the ways of their children, how and where, and in what company they spend their time. This may prevent many extravagances which children, left to themselves, run into, by which they bring both themselves and their parents to shame. Parents should examine their children, not to frighten or discourage them, so as to make them hate home, or tempt them to tell a lie; but to commend them if they have done well, and with mildness to reprove and caution them if they have done otherwise. It is a good question for us to ask ourselves in the close of every day, Where have I gleaned to-day? What improvement have I made in knowledge and grace? What have I done or gotten that will turn to a good account?

Ruth gave a particular account of the kindness she had received from Boaz, and of his having directed her to attend his servants throughout all the harvest. Children should look upon themselves as accountable to their parents and those over them, and not think it a disparagement to them to be examined. Let them do that which is good, and they shall have praise of the same. Ruth did not tell Naomi how Boaz had commended her. Humility teaches us, not only not to praise ourselves, but not to be forward to publish others' praises of us.

Naomi prayed heartily for him that had been her daughter's benefactor, even before she knew his name; but more particularly when she was told who it was. It seems she had been so long in Moab, that she had forgotten her kindred in the land of Israel, till by this providence God brought it to her mind. Naomi presently recollects, The man is near of kin to us. This thought brings another; He is our next kinsman, our Goel, who has the right to redeem our estate, and

from him we may expect further kindness. Boaz had been kind to Elimelech's family before his removal to the land of Moab. Naomi rejoiced that his care of her had revived when she so much needed his assistance, and she begged the Lord to repay him with his blessing. She appointed Ruth to continue her attendance in the fields of Boaz; Let them not meet thee in any other field; for that will be construed as a contempt of his courtesy. Our blessed Saviour is our Goel; he has a right to redeem; if we expect to receive benefit by him, let us closely adhere to him, and his fields, and his family; let us not go to the world and its fields for that which is to be had with him only, and which he has encouraged us to expect from him. Has the Lord dealt bountifully with us? Let us not be found in any other field, nor seek for happiness and satisfaction in the creature. We lose Divine favours, if we slight them.

Ruth dutifully observed her mother's directions; she continued to glean, to the end, not only of barley-harvest, but of the wheat-harvest, which followed it, that she might gather food in harvest to serve for winter, Prov. 6. 8. She also kept fast by the maidens of Boaz, with whom she cultivated an acquaintance. But she constantly came to her mother early in the evening, as became a virtuous woman. And when the harvest was ended, she kept her aged mother company at home. Dinah went out to see the daughters of the land; her vanity ended in disgrace. Ruth kept at home, and helped to maintain her mother, and went out on no other errand than to get provision for her; we shall find afterwards her humility and industry ended in preferment.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1—5. *The directions given to Ruth by Naomi to claim Boaz for her husband, agreeably to the laws and usages of those times.*

Naomi's care for her daughter was very commendable. She that was old had resolved upon a perpetual widowhood, yet was far from confining her daughter-in-law to it, who was young. Age must not make itself a standard to youth. The married state, when properly entered into, is a rest, as much as any thing upon earth can be so, as it ought to fix the affections and form a connexion for life. It, therefore, should be engaged in with great seriousness, with earnest

prayers for direction, for the blessing of God, and with regard to his precepts. Parents should carefully advise their children in this important concern, that it may be well with them, as to their souls. Be it always remembered, That is best for us which is best for our souls. It is the duty of parents to seek this rest for their children in due time. Also parents are to be very cautious what injunctions they lay upon their children, that they lead them not into temptation; the authority of a parent will not justify a sinful action.

The course Naomi advised appears to us extraordinary; but we may conclude that Naomi knew the laws and usages of Israel. If the proposed measure had borne the appearance of evil, we cannot think that she would have advised it. The law concerning a man's marrying his brother's widow when he died childless, extended, it seems, to other near relations when there were no brethren. Law and custom gave Ruth, who was now proselyted to the true religion, a legal claim upon Boaz. It was customary for widows to assert this claim, Deut. 25. 5—10. Considering Boaz's character and superiority of station, she thought that this was best done in a private manner. But this proposal and Ruth's conduct is not recorded for imitation in other times, and is not to be judged by modern rules. And we may be sure, if Ruth had apprehended any evil in what her mother advised, she was a woman of too much virtue and too much sense to promise as she did.

3. The threshing-floors in the east were often covered at top, but open at the sides, that the wind might come in for winnowing the corn. Even wealthy persons in early times looked after their harvest, and would sleep in their threshing-floors to secure the grain. In warm climates people frequently, in the summer, sleep in the open air, and in the same dress as they wear by day.

Ver. 6—13. *Boaz acknowledges the duty of a kinsman.*

What in one age or nation would be accounted improper, is not reckoned so in another age or another nation, though it is somewhat difficult for us to account for Naomi's simplicity and wisdom in this. The character of Boaz rendered it probable that any improper conduct on the part of Ruth would cause him to consider her as unfit to be his wife. Being a judge of Israel, and expert in the law, he would tell her what she should do, ver. 4. He would inform her whether he had the right of redemption, and what methods

must be taken, and what rites used, in order to accomplishing her marriage with him or another person.—(27.) The whole narrative is written with peculiar simplicity, and the interviews between Boaz and Ruth display the most unaffected piety, liberality, and modesty; and their reverent observance of the mosaic law, as well as of ancient customs, is here portrayed in very lively and animated colours.—(33.)

The conduct of Boaz calls for the highest praise. He attempted not to take advantage of Ruth; he did not disdain her as a poor, destitute stranger, nor accuse her of interested views, or suspect her of any ill intentions. He commended her for the preference she had given him according to the law, and perceiving her apprehensions, he endeavoured to remove her fears. He spoke honourably of her as a virtuous woman, made her a conditional promise, and as soon as the morning arrived, sent her away with a present to her mother-in-law.

Boaz made his promise conditional, and could not do otherwise, for there was a kinsman nearer than he, to whom the right of redemption belonged. This he knew, but we may reasonably suppose Naomi a foreigner, who could not be exact in the pedigree of her husband's family, was ignorant of it, otherwise she would never have sent her daughter to make her claim of Boaz. Yet he does not bid her go herself to this other kinsman; that had been to put too great a hardship upon her. He promises that he would himself learn his mind. The hebrew word for a widow signifies one that is dumb; Boaz will therefore open his mouth for the dumb, Prov. 31. 8, and will say that for this widow which she knew not how to say for herself. If the other kinsman refused to do the kinsman's part, he would do it; would marry the widow, redeem the land, and so repair the family. This promise he confirms with a solemn oath, for it was a conditional contract of marriage. In the choice of yoke-fellows, virtue should especially be regarded; known, approved virtue; let religion determine the choice, and it will certainly crown the choice and make it comfortable.

9. Casting the skirt of the outward garment over the head of the spouse, was a ceremony usual at marriages. The expression here used, seems to be a phrase implying the demand on the part of Ruth to be taken by Boaz for his wife, in

compliance with the mosaic law, Deut. 25. 5—10. Many have attempted to raise cavils respecting the conduct of Ruth, while others have thought it necessary to enter into long explanations to extenuate or excuse what they have considered as blamable in her proceedings. But there is no cause for the first, nor any occasion for the latter. There was nothing in the conduct of Ruth contrary to any precepts of the mosaic dispensation: it was directed by her mother-in-law, and pursued by her, in compliance with those precepts, ver. 2, 9. No one supposes the history was recorded for imitation at the present day, or in countries where the laws and customs wholly differ from those of the jews. It may be well further to remark, that some european customs, which are accounted the most correct, and adherence to which is taught as a matter of propriety, are considered as most indecorous and improper by persons of eastern nations who come among us, because they are opposed to their ideas of what is right. On the other hand, there are habits and manners most approved among them, but which are directly the reverse of european ideas of propriety. Each must be judged by its own standard as to mere external circumstances, while the motives and the results of both are to be tried by the word of God, and not by human views. Nothing in the principles upon which Naomi and Ruth acted, was opposed to that unerring standard, nor is there any thing in the result which indicates that there had been the smallest departure therefrom.

Ver. 14—18. *Ruth's return to her mother-in-law.*

Ruth was welcomed by her mother-in-law. Her advice was to "sit still." She had done all that was fit for her to do, she must patiently wait the issue, and not be perplexed about it. Let us cast our care upon Providence, follow that and attend the motions of it, composing ourselves into expectation of the event, with a resolution to acquiesce in it, whatever it be. Sometimes that proves best done for us, which is least our own doing. Naomi assured her that Boaz, having undertaken this matter, would not be at rest till he had finished it. He would be sure to manage it well. Much more reason have true believers to be careful for nothing, but to cast their care on God, because he has promised to care for them; what need have we to care if he do so? Sit still, see how the matter will fall, for the Lord will perfect that which concerns thee, and will make it work for good to thee, Psa. 138. 8. Our strength is to sit still, Isa. 30. 7.

This narrative may encourage us to lay ourselves by faith at the feet of Christ; He is our near Kinsman; having taken our nature upon him, he is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. He is our Goel, him that has the right to redeem. Let us lay ourselves at the feet of our Redeemer, to receive from him his direc-

tions; Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Acts 9. 6. At no time can it be improper that we, poor polluted sinners, should apply to Jesus Christ, our nearest Kinsman, our Brother, as dwelling in human nature, entreating him to espouse our souls to himself, to take us under his almighty care, and to admit us to share his unsearchable riches. He will never blame us as doing this unseasonably, or condemn us for any imperfection in our application. He will take our love to him, and our desire for his salvation, most kindly. When we have applied to him, he will not rest till he has accomplished our desires, and will in the mean time communicate blessings to us, and to ours, in answer to our prayers. Nor can we too earnestly desire and seek the same rest for our children and friends, that it may be well with them also.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1—8. *Ruth's nearest kinsman refuses to redeem her inheritance.*

This chapter relates the offer made to the nearest kinsman of Ruth to redeem her and the field which her husband left, which he refused to do, upon which Boaz redeemed both, and married Ruth before the elders of the city as witnesses, who congratulated them on that occasion.—(27.)

In this transaction there is reference to the laws given by Moses respecting inheritances, and doubtless the whole was settled in the regular, customary, and legal manner. It illustrates the laws concerning the marrying of a brother's widow, and has reference to the gospel also; for from this marriage descended David, and the Son of David also, whose espousals of the gentile church is hereby typified.

The kinsman seemed forward to redeem the land, till he was told that if he did so, he must marry the widow. He liked the land well enough. But Boaz told him there was a widow, and if he had the land he must take her with it; the Divine law, or the usage of the country, would oblige him to it. However it was, this kinsman, when he heard the conditions of the bargain, refused it. In like manner many are shy of the great redemption; they are not willing to espouse religion; they have heard well of it, and have nothing to say against it; they will give it their good word, but they are willing to part with it, and cannot be bound

to it, for fear of marring their own inheritance in this world. Heaven they could be glad of, but holiness will not agree with the lusts they have already espoused, and therefore let who will purchase heaven at that rate, they cannot.

The right of redemption was fairly resigned to Boaz. In those ancient times it was not the usage to pass estates by writings, as afterward, Jer. 32. 10, &c., but by some sign or ceremony. The ceremony here used was, he that surrendered, plucked off his shoe, (the chaldees says, it was the glove of his right hand,) and gave it to him to whom he made the surrender: this was a testimony in Israel. Interpreters think this had no relation to the law, Deut. 25. 9, and that the drawing off the shoe was not any disgrace, as there, but a confirmation of the surrender, and evidence that it was not fraudulently or surreptitiously obtained. Fair and open dealing in all matters of contract and commerce, is what all must make conscience of, who would approve themselves israelites indeed without guile. How honourably and honestly does Boaz come by this purchase! Honesty will be found the best policy.

1. The gate of an eastern city is the usual resort of persons who have no urgent employment; the courts of judicature frequently were held there, and any business transacted which required witnesses, or was to be made a matter of public notoriety.

5. In the day thou purchasest the land from the hand of Naomi, thou wilt also acquire Ruth the moabitess, the wife of the dead.—*Kennicott.*

Ver. 9—12. *Boaz redeems the inheritance, and marries Ruth.*

Boaz delays not to perform his promise. Men are generally ready to embrace opportunities for increasing their estates, but few know the value of godliness; and those who place the chief value on carnal things, will not duly estimate spiritual excellence in the character of others. Such are the wise men of this world, whom the Lord charges with folly. They attend not to the concerns of their souls, but reject the salvation of Christ, for fear of marring their inheritance. Selfishness causes some to reject with disdain their nearest relatives, though excellent, if poor, and needing their assistance. In the marriage relation "a prudent wife is of the Lord," and "the price of a virtuous woman is above rubies," Prov. 19. 14; 31. 10; such a one is unspeakably more valuable than one possessed of

wealth and outward advantages, but destitute of wisdom and grace. And observe, that God did Boaz the honour to bring him into the genealogy of the Messiah, by which his family was dignified above all the families of Israel; while the kinsman, that was afraid of diminishing himself, and marring his inheritance, by marrying the widow, has his name, family, and inheritance forgotten.

Our Lord Jesus is our Redeemer, our everlasting Redeemer; he looked with compassion on the deplorable state of fallen mankind, as Boaz looked on Ruth; at a vast expense he redeemed the heavenly inheritance for us, which by sin was forfeited into the hands of Divine justice, and which we could never have been able to redeem. He purchased a peculiar people, whom he would espouse to himself, though strangers and foreigners, like Ruth, poor and despised, that the name of that dead and buried race might not be cut off for ever. Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor; but he was abundantly recompensed by his Father, who, because he thus humbled himself, hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name. To this union Christ invites the perishing sinner. This relation to the poor, despised believer, he avows and glories in. Let us then joyfully accept his salvation, look for all our happiness from him, and devote ourselves to his service. Let us glorify him with our bodies and spirits, which are his; by obeying his commandments, following his example, recommending him and his salvation, by word and deed, to all around us.

Ver. 13—22. *Birth of Obed—Genealogy of David.*

Ruth bore a son through whom thousands and myriads were born to God; and in being the lineal ancestor of Christ she was instrumental in the happiness of all that shall be saved by him, even of us gentiles, as well as those that were of Jewish descent. She was a witness for God to the gentile world, that he had not utterly forsaken them, but that in due time they should become incorporated with his chosen people, and become partakers of his salvation.—(61.)

Naomi was considered as having especial cause for joy. She had her old age comforted and supported through her daughter-in-law, who loved her, and had been a greater blessing to her than seven sons. Observe the piety of the language

and the conduct of all parties on this occasion. Devotion was found in the common expressions used among the israelites. Prayer to God attended the marriage, and praise to him attended the birth of the child. What pity it is that pious language should either be disused among christians, or degenerate into formality!

Now is Marah turned back to Naomi; and Orpah, if she hear of this in Moab, cannot but envy her sister's happiness. Oh the sure and bountiful payments of the Almighty! Who ever came under his wing in vain? Who ever lost by trusting him? Who ever forsook the Moab of this world for the true Israel, and did not at last rejoice in the change?—(34.)

Here is the descent of David from Ruth.

It had been foretold to the jews, that the Messiah should be of the tribe of Judah, and it was *afterwards* further revealed that he should be of the family of David. Therefore it was necessary for the full understanding of these prophecies, that the history of the family in that tribe should be written *before* those prophecies were revealed, so as to prevent suspicion of any kind.—(33.)

The period came when Bethlehem-Judah displayed greater wonders than those recorded in the history of Ruth, when the outcast babe of another forlorn female of the same race appeared, controlling the counsels of the roman master of the world, and drawing princes and wise men from the east, with treasures of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh to his feet. His name shall endure for ever, and all nations shall call him blessed. In the adoption of Ruth into the church of God, and the commonwealth of Israel, we

have the ray of hope rising upon the gentile world. That stranger is employed in bringing forward the mighty plan to maturity. In that Seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.—(39.)

Ruth renounced the gods of Moab; she left her relations to serve the God of Israel, and attached herself to a poor widow whom she must help to maintain by her industry. This was proof of her sincerity. Thus she came to trust under the wings of the Lord God of Israel, depending on his power, care, and love, both for the blessings of salvation and things needful for this life. In all ages and nations conversion is essentially the same; irreligion, or false religion, is exchanged for the spiritual worship of the true God, through the appointed Mediator. The practice of sin is changed for the pursuit of true holiness; self-dependence is changed for reliance on God's mercy, grace, and providence for every thing. Happiness is no longer expected from this world, but from the favour of God; and the company of the workers of iniquity is exchanged for the society of those who love and serve God. But *circumstances* depend much upon outward situation. Those who have godly parents and relations, who are engaged in lawful and useful employments, and live in peaceable times, have not the same sacrifices to make as those who are called out of families of opposers, from occupations inconsistent with the precepts of God's word, or who live in times of persecution. But the principle and the practice are in all cases alike, though the application varies, according as different trials are allotted to us in the providence of God.

THE FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL.

This book, and that which follows, bear the name of Samuel. The first begins with an account of him; and the rest of these two books contains the history of the reigns of Saul and David, who were both anointed by him. The vulgate latin calls them the first and second Books of the Kings; and the two that follow, the third and fourth. The greek version calls them the first and second Books of the kingdoms. These two books contain the history of the last two of the judges, Eli and Samuel, who were not, as the rest, men of war, but priests; they then enter upon the history of the kings. They contain a considerable part of the sacred history, are sometimes referred to in the New Testament, and often in the titles of David's Psalms, which, if placed in their order, would mostly fall within these books. It is uncertain who was the penman of them; it is probable that Samuel wrote the history of his own time; and that, after him, some of the prophets who were with David, perhaps Nathan and Gad, continued it. See 1 Chron. 29. 29.

In this book we have an account of Eli, and the wickedness of his sons; also of Samuel, his character and actions. Then of the advancement of Saul to be the king of Israel, and his ill-behaviour, until his death made way for David's succession to the throne, who was an eminent type of Christ.

His patience, modesty, constancy, persecution by open enemies and feigned friends, are left to the church, and to every member of it, as a pattern and example for their state and vocation. Many things in this book encourage the faith, hope, and patience, of the suffering believer. There are also many useful cautions and awful warnings.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1—8. *Elkanah worships every year at Shiloh—His two wives, Hannah and Peninnah.*

THE worship at Shiloh was kept up, though probably in an irregular manner. However, in those times of apostasy and idolatry, when men abhorred the offering of the Lord, through the wickedness of Eli's sons, it was commendable in Elkanah to go up, though but once a year, perhaps at the passover, to worship the Lord. The israelites were confined to one place, one altar, and one priesthood, therefore Elkanah could not go elsewhere. But though the wickedness of ministers does not deprive the pious christian of the blessing, nor furnish a sufficient excuse for neglecting the ordinances of God; yet not being under the like limitation, we should prefer attending on their ministry, who appear at least to be walking heavenward themselves, as well as teaching others the true way thither.

We have here an account of the state of the family of Elkanah. It was a devout family. All the families of Israel should be so, but levites' families in particular. Ministers should be patterns of family religion. Yet Elkanah's was a divided family, and the divisions of it carried with them both guilt and grief. Where there is piety, it is pity but there should be unity. The joint devotions of a family should put an end to divisions in it. The original cause of this division was, Elkanah's marrying two wives, which was a transgression of the original institution of marriage, to which our Saviour reduces it, Matt. 19. 5, 8. How much better does the law of God provide for our comfort and ease in this world, than we should if we were left to ourselves!

Elkanah kept up his attendance at God's altar, notwithstanding this unhappy difference in his family, and took his wives and children with him, that if they could not agree in other things, they might agree to worship God together. If the devotions of a family prevail not to put an end to its divisions, yet let not the divisions put a stop to the devotions. He did all he could to encourage Hannah under her affliction. Christ loves his church, notwithstanding her infirmities, her barren-

ness; and so ought men to love their wives, Eph. 5. 25. To abate our just love to any relation for the sake of any infirmity which they cannot help, and which is their affliction, is to make God's providence quarrel with his precept, and very unkindly to add affliction to the afflicted. Elkanah studied to show his love so much the more, because Hannah was afflicted, insulted, and low-spirited. It is wisdom and duty to support the weakest, and to hold up those that are run down. He showed his great love to her by the share he gave her of his peace-offerings. Thus we should testify our affection to our friends and relations, by abounding in prayer for them. The better we love them, the more room let us give them in our prayers.

Peninnah was extremely provoking. But it was very sinful at such a time to show her malice, when pure hands were to be lifted up at God's altar without wrath and quarrelling. The great adversary to our purity and peace is most industrious to ruffle us, when we should be most composed. She continued to do this from year to year, it was her constant practice. It is evidence of a base disposition, to delight in grieving those who are of a sorrowful spirit, and in putting those out of humour, that are apt to fret and be uneasy. We ought to bear one another's burdens, not add to them. Hannah could not bear the provocation; it was her infirmity so far to give way to the sorrow of the world as to unfit herself for holy joy in God. Those who are of a fretful spirit, and are apt to lay provocations too much to heart, are enemies to themselves, and strip themselves of many comforts both of life and godliness. Yet she did not upbraid Elkanah, but took the trouble wholly to herself, which made her an object of compassion. Elkanah showed himself much concerned. They that are united by marriage ought to share each other's troubles. He gives her a loving reproof for it. He puts her upon inquiring the cause of her grief; let her consider whether she had reason to be troubled to such a degree; especially so as to be taken off from holy things. Our sorrow upon any account is sinful

and inordinate, when it diverts us from our duty to God, and imbitters our comfort in him; when it makes us unthankful for the mercies we enjoy, and distrustful of the goodness of God to us in further mercies; when it casts a damp upon our joy in Christ, and hinders us from doing the duty, and taking the comfort of our particular relations. He intimates, Thou knowest thou hast my affection entire, and let that comfort thee. We ought to notice our comforts, to keep us from grieving for our crosses; for our crosses we deserve, but our comforts we have forfeited. We must look at that which is for us, as well as that which is against us. God hath set the one over against the other, Eccl. 7. 14, and so should we.

Ver. 9—18. *Hannah's prayer—Eli in mistake rebukes, but afterwards blesses her.*

Elkanah had gently reproved Hannah for her inordinate grief, and here we find the good effect of the reproof. 1. She did not harden herself in sorrow, nor grow sullen when reproved for it; but when she perceived her husband uneasy, she cheered up her spirits. It is as great self-denial to control our passions, as it is to control our appetites. 2. It put her upon considering, Do I well to be angry? Instead of binding the burden thus upon my own shoulders, had I not better ease myself of it, and cast it upon the Lord by prayer? They are at Shiloh, at the door of the tabernacle, where God promised to meet his people, and which was the house of prayer. They had lately offered peace-offerings, to obtain the favour of God and all good, and in token of their communion with him. Taking the comfort of being accepted of him, they had feasted upon the sacrifice, and now it was proper to put up her prayer in the virtue of that sacrifice. For the peace-offerings typified Christ's mediation, as well as the sin-offerings, as by it not only atonement is made for sin, but our prayers are heard and accepted; and an answer of peace is obtained for us: to that Sacrifice, in all our supplications, we must look.

Concerning Hannah's prayer, observe the warm and lively devotion there was in it. Our affections should make us more lively in our addresses to God. Our blessed Saviour himself, being in an agony, prayed more earnestly, Luke 22. 44. She mingled tears with her prayers, she considered the tender mercy of our

God, who knows the troubled soul. She was particular in her petition. God gives us leave, in prayer, not only to ask good things in general, but to mention that special good thing which we most need and desire. She made a solemn vow or promise, that if God would give her a son, she would give him up to God. He would be by birth a levite, and thus devoted to the service of God; but he should be by her vow a nazirite, and even his childhood should be sacred. She spoke so softly, that none could hear her. Hereby she testified her belief of God's knowledge of the heart and its desires. Prayer is not a thing we have reason to be ashamed of, but we must avoid all appearance of ostentation. Let what passes between God and our souls be kept to ourselves.

Eli was high priest, and judge in Israel. The tabernacle is here called the temple, because it was now fixed, and served all the purposes of a temple. Eli thought Hannah was drunk. It is one bad effect of the abounding of iniquity, that it often gives occasion to suspect the innocent. He was wrong to pass so severe a censure without better observation or information. His fault was the worse, as he was the priest of the Lord, who should have had compassion on the ignorant, Heb. 5. 2. It ill becomes us to be rash and hasty in censures of others, and to be forward to believe people guilty of bad things, while either the matter of fact on which the censure is grounded, is doubtful and unproved, or is capable of a good construction. Especially we ought to be cautious how we censure the devotions of others, lest we call that hypocrisy, enthusiasm, or superstition, which is really the fruit of an honest zeal, and accepted of God.

Hannah humbly vindicated herself from the crime with which she was charged. She did not retort the charge, and upbraid him with the wicked conduct of his own sons. When we are at any time unjustly censured, we have need to set a double watch before the door of our lips, that we do not recriminate, and return censure for censure. Hannah thought it enough to vindicate herself, and so must we. Drunkards are children of Belial, women drunkards particularly; children of the wicked one; children of disobedience. She accounts for the manner which had given occasion to his suspicion. I am a woman

of a sorrowful spirit, dejected and discomposed, and that is the reason I do not look as other people. She had been, more than usual, fervent in prayer to God, and that, she tells him, was the true reason of the disorder she seemed to be in. When we are unjustly censured, we should endeavour, not only to clear ourselves, but to satisfy our brethren, by giving them a just and true account of that which they misapprehended.

Though the character of Eli was very defective, there are many traces in it of true piety, and his answer is one. He was open to conviction, willing to acknowledge his mistake, and to make amends. By our meek and humble carriage toward those that reproach us, because they do not know us, we may perhaps make them our friends, and turn their censures of us into prayers for us. Hannah went away with great satisfaction of mind. Whence came this sudden happy change? She had by prayer committed her case to God herself, and Eli had prayed for her. Prayer is heart's ease to a gracious soul; the seed of Jacob have often found it so, being confident that God will never say unto them, Seek ye me in vain: see Phil. 4. 6, 7. Prayer will smooth the countenance; it should do so. None will long remain miserable or uncomfortable, who improve aright the privilege of access to the mercy-seat of a reconciled God in Christ Jesus.

12. It appears that she said much more than is here expressed. We are to judge the like of the prayers and sermons of other holy persons recorded in scripture, which gives only the sum or substance of them. This consideration may help us much in understanding some passages of the bible.—*Poole.*

Ver. 19—28. *The birth of Samuel—Hannah presents him to the Lord according to her vow.*

Here is the return of Elkanah and his family to their own habitation. They improved their time at the tabernacle: every day they were there, even that which was fixed for their journey home, they worshipped God. And they rose up early to do it. It is good to begin the day with God. Let Him that is the first, have the first. They had a journey before them, and a family of children to take with them, yet they would not move till they had worshipped God together. Prayer and provender do not hinder a journey. When men are in such haste to set out upon journeys, or to engage in business, that they have not time to wor-

ship God, they are likely to proceed without his presence and blessing. They had spent several days in religious worship, yet they attended once more. We should not be weary of well doing. Here is an account of the birth and name of this desired son. Though God seems long to forget his people's burdens, troubles, cares, and prayers, he will at length make it clearly appear that they are not out of his mind. This son the mother called Samuel, which signifies, heard of God, or asked of God.

Elkanah went up every year to worship at the tabernacle. But Hannah, though she felt a warm regard for the courts of God's house, begged leave to stay at home. God will have mercy, and not sacrifice. Those who are detained from public ordinances, by the nursing and tending of little children, may take comfort from this instance, and believe, that if they do that duty in a right spirit, God will graciously accept them therein; and though they tarry at home, they shall divide the spoil. She would not go up to Shiloh till her son was big enough to be left there. Elkanah agrees to what she proposes. Behold, how good and pleasant it is, when yoke-fellows thus accommodate one another; each thinking well of what the other does, especially in works of piety and charity. He adds a prayer, Only the Lord establish his word, that is, God preserve the child through the perils of his infancy, that the solemn vow of which God signified his acceptance, by giving us the child, may be performed in its season, and so the whole may be accomplished. When domestic employments render it a duty to be absent from public ordinances, we should abound the more in the exercises of secret devotion. And when these restraints are removed, the true believer will go with more eager desires to the courts of the Lord.

Hannah presented her child with a sacrifice. So far was she from thinking that by presenting her son to God, she made God her debtor, that she thought it requisite by these slain offerings to seek God's acceptance of her living sacrifice. All our covenants with God for ourselves, and ours, must be made by sacrifice, the great Sacrifice. Also with a grateful acknowledgment of God's goodness in answer to prayer. For this mercy, this comfort, I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition. See Psal. 34. 2, 4, 6.

She made a full surrender of all her interest in this child, unto the Lord. "I have lent him," it may be rendered, I have returned him unto the Lord, as from him I received the child. Whatever we give to God, it is what we have first asked and received from him. All our gifts to him were first his gifts to us. Of thine own, Lord, have we given thee, 1 Chron. 29. 14, 16. It was her intention that, as a levite and a nazarete, Samuel should spend all his life in the service of the sanctuary. But the Lord was pleased afterwards to employ him as a prophet and judge in the affairs of Israel. The child Samuel worshipped the Lord there, he gave early indications of true piety. Little children should learn betimes to worship God. Their parents should instruct them in it, and bring them to it, put them upon doing it as well as they can, and God will graciously accept them, and will teach them to do better.

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1—10. *Hannah's song of thanksgiving.*

The word prayer is sometimes used for any act of devotion, whether petition or thanksgiving. When Hannah asked for Samuel, she spake in her heart; that matter lay entirely between God and her soul. But when, according to her vow, she presented him to God, a public thanksgiving was necessary for his glory and to edify the people. And while her heart was enlarged with love and gratitude, she was led by the spirit of prophecy to speak of the dispensation of God's providence and grace to Israel, to the church of God and the world at large, to the end of time. Her heart rejoiced, not in Samuel, but in the Lord. She overlooks the gift, and praises the Giver. She expected and rejoiced in the salvation of the Lord, and in expectation of its being completed in glory, as well as of His coming who is the whole salvation of his people.

Hannah here celebrates four of God's glorious attributes. 1. His holiness. This is most praised by those who always behold his face, Isa. 6. 3; Rev. 4. 8. 2. His almighty power. Hannah had experienced a mighty support by staying herself upon God; she speaks as she had found, and seems to refer to Deut. 32. 31. 3. His unsearchable wisdom. The Lord, the Judge of all, is a God of knowledge;

he clearly and perfectly sees into the character of every person, and the merits of every cause, and he gives knowledge and understanding to those who seek it of him. 4. His unerring justice. By him actions are weighed. His own are so, in his eternal counsels; the actions of the children of men are so, in the balances of his judgment; he will render to every man according to his work, and is not mistaken in what any man is, or does. She solaces herself in these things. What we give God the glory of, we may take the comfort of: Hannah does so. If she here at all notices the boastings of Peninnah, she certainly also meant something greater, and addressed the enemies of the church as present.

The strong are soon weakened, and the weak are soon strengthened, when God pleases. The rich are soon impoverished, and the poor enriched of a sudden. To some God gives power to get wealth, from others he takes away power to keep the wealth they have. Are we poor? God made us poor, which is a good reason why we should be content, and reconcile ourselves to our condition. Are we rich? God made us rich, which is a good reason why we should be thankful, and serve him cheerfully in the abundance he gives us. Empty families are replenished, and numerous families diminished and made few. God is the sovereign Lord of life and death. The Lord killeth and maketh alive. Understand it of God's sovereign dominion and universal agency, in the lives and deaths of the children of men. Do any glory, as Peninnah, in the increase of their families, and despise those who remain childless? The providence of God can soon reduce their numbers, while the desolate are increased. He killeth and bringeth down to the grave; he brings even to death, and then revives and raises up, when even life was despaired, and a sentence of death received, 2 Cor. 1. 8, 9. Advancement and abasement are both from God. He respects not man's wisdom or imagined excellences, but selects those whom the world accounts foolish, teaching them to feel their guilt, and to value his free and precious salvation.

A reason is given for all these dispensations, which obliges us to acquiesce in them, how surprising soever they are—for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's.

This shows God's almighty power, which cannot be controlled. What cannot he do in the affairs of families and kingdoms, far beyond our conception and expectation, who hangs the earth upon nothing? Job 26. 7. Having testified her joyful triumph in what God had done, and is doing, she concludes with joyful hopes of what he would do. Pious affections in those days, rose up many times to the height of prophecy, whereby God continued in that nation his true religion, in the midst of their idolatrous inclinations. This prophecy may refer to the government of Israel by Samuel, and David whom he was employed to anoint. Israel should now shortly become great and considerable. The birth of Samuel was, as it were, the dawning of that day. But we have reason to think that this prophecy looks to the kingdom of Christ, and the administration of that kingdom of grace, of which Hannah now speaks, having spoken so largely of the kingdom of providence. And here is the first time that we meet with the name MESSIAH, or his Anointed. The ancient expositors, both Jewish and Christian, make it to look beyond David, to the Son of David. Glorious things are here spoken of the kingdom of the Mediator, both before and since his incarnation; for the method of the administration of it, both by the eternal Word, and by that Word made flesh, is much the same.

Concerning that kingdom we are here assured—1. That all the loyal subjects of it shall be carefully and powerfully protected. He will keep the feet of his saints. He will secure the ground they stand on, and establish their goings; he will set a guard of grace upon their affections and actions, that their feet may neither wander out of the way, nor stumble in the way. When their feet are ready to slip, Psa. 73. 2, his mercy holds them up, Psa. 94. 18, and keeps them from falling, Jude 24. While we keep God's ways, he will keep our feet. See Psa. 37. 23, 24. 2. That all the powers engaged against it shall not be able to effect its ruin. God's strength is engaged for the church; and while it is so, man's strength shall not prevail against it. 3. That all the enemies of it will certainly be broken and brought down. Who can stand before God's thunderbolts? 4. The conquests and commands of this kingdom shall extend to distant

regions; The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth. David's victories and dominions reached far, but the utmost parts of the earth are promised to the Messiah for his possession, to be reduced to his golden sceptre, or ruled by his iron rod, Psa. 2. 8. 5. The power and honour of Messiah, the Prince, shall grow and increase more and more. He shall give strength unto his King, his beloved Son, for the accomplishing his great undertaking, Psa. 89. 21, and see Luke 22. 43; strengthen him to go through the difficulties of his humiliation, and in his exaltation he will lift up the head, Psa. 110. 7, lift up the horn, the power and honour of his Anointed, and make him higher than the kings of the earth, Psa. 89. 27. This crowns the triumph, and is, more than any thing, the matter of her exaltation. This secures the hope; the subjects of Christ's kingdom will be safe, and the enemies of it will be ruined; for the Anointed, the Lord Christ, is girt with strength, and is able to save and destroy unto the uttermost.

Ver. 11—26. *The wickedness of Eli's sons—
Samuel's ministry.*

We have the good character of Elkanah's family, and the bad character of Eli's family; as if the historian intended to set the one over against the other. Things went on well in Elkanah's family. Hannah resigns one child to God, and is recompensed with five. There is nothing lost by lending to God, or losing for him; it shall be repaid a hundred-fold, Matt. 19. 29. They kept up constant attendance at the house of God; having found the benefit of drawing near to God, they would omit no appointed season for it. Little children must learn betimes to minister to the Lord; parents must train them to it, and God will accept them; particularly let them learn to respect their teachers, as Samuel did Eli. None can begin too soon to be religious; see Psa. 8. 2, and Matt. 21. 15, 16.

The Levites were not called to any peculiar services till they were twenty-five years of age; but Samuel being devoted to the Lord in a special manner, was from a child employed about the sanctuary in the things he was capable of. As he did this from a pious disposition of mind, it was called ministering unto the Lord. He received a blessing from the Lord. He grew before the Lord as a tender plant, ver. 21; grew on, ver. 26, in

strength and stature, especially in wisdom, understanding, and fitness for business. Those young people that serve God as well as they can, he will enable to improve, that they may serve him better. Those who are planted in God's house shall flourish, Psa. 92. 13. He was in favour with the Lord, and with man. It is great encouragement to children to be tractable, virtuous, and good, that if they are so, both God and man will love them. What is here said of Samuel, is said of our blessed Saviour, that great example, Luke 2. 52.

Let us now see the abominable wickedness of Eli's sons. Eli himself was a good man, and had educated his sons well, giving them good instructions, setting them a good example, and putting up many prayers for them; yet, when they grew up, they proved sons of Belial, profane, wicked men; They knew not the Lord. They could not but have a notional knowledge of God and his law, a form of knowledge, Rom. 2. 20, yet, because their practice was not accordingly, they are spoken of as wholly ignorant of God; they lived as if they knew nothing at all of God.

They neglected or delayed burning the fat, which was essential to the acceptance of the offering, as it typified the offerer's repentance and faith, and insisted upon having such portions of the raw flesh as they chose, that they might indulge their appetites. Many were so prejudiced by this scandalous behaviour as to neglect religious services; and those who persevered in their attendance were grieved, and had no comfort in the ordinances of God. Nothing brings greater reproach upon religion, than ministers' covetousness, sensuality, and imperiousness. In the midst of this sad story comes in the repeated mention of Samuel's devotion, as an instance of the power of God's grace, in preserving him pure and pious, in the midst of this wicked set.

Eli yielded to his natural timidity and feebleness of mind. He shunned trouble and exertion. This disposition induced him to indulge his children, without using parental authority to restrain and correct them when young. He winked at the abuses in the service of the sanctuary till they became customs, and led to greater abominations; and his sons, who should have instructed those who en-

gaged in the service of the sanctuary, solicited them to wickedness. Even then Eli did not exert himself as became the high priest and judge of Israel to repress these enormities, and counteract the fatal effects of their crimes upon the minds of the people, by making them examples in punishment. Their offence was so directly against the Lord, being committed even in offering the sacrifices for sins, which typified the atonement of the Saviour, that no expiation was appointed, and no entreaty or intercession could be made for them. Sins against the remedy, the atonement itself, are most dangerous, as they tread under foot the blood of the covenant, and then there remains no more sacrifice, Heb. 10. 26.

Eli's reproof was too mild and gentle. They had no regard to his authority or his affection. They had long hardened their hearts, and now God, in righteous judgment, withheld from them the grace they had resisted and forfeited. Those who are deaf to the reproofs of wisdom, are manifestly marked for ruin, 2 Chron. 25. 16: see Prov. 29. 1. Immediately upon this Samuel's tractableness is again mentioned. God's grace is his own; he denied it to the sons of the high priest, and gave it to the child of an obscure country levite. In general none are more abandoned than the degenerate children of godly persons, when they have broken through the restraints of shame and conscience. The cause of godliness suffers in losing those families that were its support, and from the prejudice which their base conduct excites in the minds of beholders.

25. The proper rendering is, "They hearkened not unto the voice of their father, *therefore* the Lord would slay them."—*T. H. Horne.*

Ver. 27—36. *The prophecy against Eli's family.*

A prophet reminded Eli of the great things God had done for the house of his fathers, and for his family. The distinguishing favours we have received from God, especially those of the spiritual priesthood, are great aggravations of sin. Those who allow their children in any evil way, and do not use their authority to restrain and punish them, do in effect honour them more than God. He declares the cutting off of the high priesthood from his family. Upon what occasion the dignity of the high priesthood was transferred from the family of Eleazar to that of Ithamar, does not appear; [There

are many sayings and doings noted in holy scripture which were not spoken of in their proper places.—(54.)] but Eli stood fair to have that honour perpetuated to his posterity; yet observe, the promise carried its own condition along with it. Walking before God is the great condition of the covenant, Gen. 17. 1.

Regard to what men by mistake consider the interest of their families, and whereby they are induced to offend God, often proves the cause of the ruin of their descendants, while disregard to all personal or relative interests, when the glory of God is considered, as is required in his word, forms the best method of promoting their welfare. The prophet foretells the particular judgments which should come upon Eli's family, to its perpetual disgrace. Let Eli's example excite parents earnestly to strive against the beginning of iniquity, and to train up their families in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In the midst of these threatenings against the house of Eli, mercy is promised to Israel, ver. 35, I will raise me up a faithful priest. This was fulfilled in Zadok, of the family of Eleazar, who came into Abiathar's place in the beginning of Solomon's reign, and was faithful to his trust; and the high priests were of his posterity as long as the levitical priesthood continued. The wickedness of ministers, though it destroy themselves, yet it shall not destroy the ministry. If some falsify their trust, yet others shall be raised up who will be true to it. God's work shall never fall to the ground for want of hands to carry it on.

The high priest is here said to walk before God's anointed. Before Jesus Christ. 1. Because this title of Anointed, Christ or Messiah, is most frequently and eminently ascribed to Christ. 2. Christ is the main scope and design not only of the New but of the Old Testament, which in all its types and ceremonies represented Christ. 3. The high priest is seldom or never said to walk or minister before the kings of Israel or Judah, but constantly before the Lord, and consequently before Christ, who, as he was God blessed for ever, was present with the ancient church of Israel, and the temple is particularly called his temple, Mal. 3. 1.—(54.)

This has full accomplishment in the priesthood of Christ, that merciful and faithful High Priest, whom God raised up when the levitical priesthood was

thrown off, who in all things did his Father's mind, and for whom God will build a sure house, build it on a rock, so that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1—10. *The word of the Lord first revealed to Samuel.*

The character of Samuel appears in an amiable light on whatever part of his life we fix our attention. We find him meek, upright, and devout, even from his childhood, and discharging diligently and faithfully, even to old age, the important offices he sustained. At an early period he received undoubted marks of the approval of Heaven. He was favoured with an express revelation, in preference to the high priest, and commissioned by God to carry a solemn reproof to him. While the youth was ready to attend the call of Eli, by night as well as day, the Lord spoke to him by an audible voice.—(60.)

We are told how unfrequent prophecy then was. Men of God were employed as messengers upon an extraordinary occasion, as ch. 2. 27; but there were no settled prophets, to whom the people might have recourse for counsel, nor from whom they might expect the discoveries of the Divine will. The rarity of prophecy made it the more precious in the account of all those who knew how to put a right value upon it. There was no open vision; there were none that were publicly known to have visions. The impiety and impurity that prevailed in the tabernacle, and corrupted the whole nation, had provoked God, as a token of his displeasure, to withdraw the spirit of prophecy.

The manner of God's revealing himself to Samuel is related very particularly. God called him by name, and he took it for Eli's call, and ran to him. Eli assured him he did not call to him, yet did not chide him for disturbing him, but mildly bade him lie down again. Servants must be ready at their masters' call; masters also must be tender of their servants' comfort. The same call was repeated, and the same mistake made, a second and third time. The call which Divine grace designs to make effectual, shall be repeated till it is so; till we come at the call. For the purpose of God, according to which we are called, shall certainly stand. Samuel was still ignorant that it was the Lord who called him. He knew the

written word, and was acquainted with the mind of God in that, but he did not yet apprehend the way in which God reveals himself to his servants the prophets, especially by a still small voice; this was altogether new and strange to him.

At length Eli, perceiving that it was the voice of God that Samuel heard, instructed him what to say. Though it was a disgrace to Eli for God's call to pass him by, and be directed to Samuel, yet he put him in the way how to entertain it. Thus the elder should do their utmost to assist and improve the younger that are rising up, though they see themselves likely to be darkened and eclipsed by them. Let us never be wanting to inform and instruct those who are coming after us, even such as will soon be preferred before us, John 1. 30. God spake the fourth time, in a way somewhat different from the other; though the call was, as at other times, a call to him by name, yet now he stood and called; which intimates that there was now some visible appearance of the Divine glory to Samuel. Samuel said as he was taught, "Speak, for thy servant heareth." Good words should be put into children's mouths betimes, and apt expressions of pious and devout affections, by which they may be prepared for acquaintance with Divine things, and trained up to converse with them.

3. Lamp is put for the lamps in the candlestick in the tabernacle, which were lighted every evening, and burnt till morning; by which time some of them usually went out, only, it is said, the western lamp never went out. This shows the transaction was in the night, before morning.—*Gill.*

Ver. 11—18. *God tells Samuel the destruction of Eli's house.*

The message God delivered to Samuel concerning Eli's house is short; not near so long as that which the man of God brought. Reference is here had to what was there said concerning both the sin and the punishment. Concerning the sin, it is "the iniquity that he knoweth." The man of God told him of it, and many a time his own conscience had told him of it. O what a great deal of guilt and corruption is there in us concerning which we may say, It is the iniquity which our own heart knoweth; we are conscious to ourselves of it! Those who do not restrain the sins of others, when it is in the power of their hand to do it, make themselves partakers of the guilt, and will be charged as accessories. Those in authority will have a great deal

to answer for, if they make not the sword which they bear a terror to evil workers. No room was left for hope that this sentence might be reversed, and the execution stayed or mitigated. No atonement shall be made for the sin, nor any abatement of the punishment. The legal sacrifices were imperfect, as there were iniquities they did not reach, which they would not purge; but the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin, and secures all those who by faith are interested in it, from that eternal death which is the wages of sin.

Samuel was neither elated with the distinction, nor neglected his business, nor showed disrespect to Eli, but afraid to grieve the aged man, was unwilling to tell him the distressing message. Those to whom God manifests himself, he makes and keeps low in their own eyes, and willing to do any thing by which they may be serviceable to his glory, though but as door-keepers in his house.

As soon as Eli heard Samuel stirring, he called for him, and having perceived before that God had spoken to him, he obliged him to tell what he had heard. A good man desires to be acquainted with all the will of God, whether it make for him or against him. His adjuration, God do so to thee, if thou hide any thing from me, may intimate the fearful doom of unfaithful watchmen. If they warn not sinners, they bring upon themselves that wrath and curse which they should have denounced, in God's name, against those who go on still in their trespasses. Samuel delivered the message as plainly and fully as he received it, not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God. Christ's ministers must deal thus faithfully. In his remarkable answer to this awful denunciation, Eli adverted to the sovereign power, the justice, wisdom, truth, and goodness of God. He acknowledged that the Lord had a right to do as he saw good, being assured that he could do nothing wrong. He was conscious that he deserved the awful sentence, and submitted to the will of God, casting himself entirely upon his mercy. The meekness, patience, and humility contained in those words show he was truly repentant; he accepted the punishment of his iniquity; It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good. He understood the sentence to intend a temporal punishment, and the entail of disgrace and poverty upon his posterity, but not

their final separation from the favour of God; he cheerfully submitted, did not repine, because he knew the demerits of his family; nor did he now intercede for the reversing of the sentence, because God had ratified it with a solemn oath. Thus we ought to quiet ourselves under God's rebukes, and not to strive with our Maker.

15. From this and other passages it appears that when the tabernacle was settled in one place as it was now at Shiloh, it was enclosed within some buildings that had doors and gates. A variety of small rooms were built around it.

Ver. 19—21. *Samuel established to be a prophet.*

“Samuel grew, for the Lord was with him.” All increase in wisdom and grace is owing to the presence of God with us. God honoured Samuel by further manifestations of himself to him. God will graciously repeat his visits to those who receive them aright. Whatever Samuel said as a prophet proved true, and was accomplished in its season. Israel knew, and owned that Samuel was established to be a prophet. Early piety will be the greatest honour of young people. Them that honour God he will honour. Samuel grew useful and very serviceable to his generation.

The appearances of the Lord in Shiloh had not been usual for a long time, but were now renewed. The Lord revealed himself to Samuel by the word of the Lord; by Christ the Word of the Lord, who appeared to him as he was wont to do to the patriarchs and prophets, and by whom the Lord revealed his will and mind, being the Angel of his presence, and the Messenger of his covenant, or by giving him a word of command to be delivered to the children of Israel.—(27.)

His ready obedience, being performed from a regard to God, and a desire to please Him, was graciously accepted, even from a child, and in consequence thereof the Divine blessing rested upon him in a very remarkable manner. His delight in the ordinances of God, was manifest; he enjoyed the friendship of God, and his very amiable temper conciliated the esteem of men. Though surrounded with bad examples, he was eminently holy. He grew in knowledge, piety, and zeal, and the Lord was with him.—(60.)

Let young persons contemplate the piety of Samuel, and from him they will be instructed to remember their Creator in the days of their youth. Young chil-

dren are capable of religion. Jeremiah, Daniel, and his companions, Timothy, and Samuel, were eminent for devotion at a tender age. Children, Samuel is a proof that your waiting upon the Lord will be pleasing to him. Samuel is a pattern of all those amiable tempers which will be your brightest ornament, and a sure source of happiness.—(60.) It was observed of Samuel from a youth, that the Lord let none of his words fall to the ground.—(13.)

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1—9. *The israelites are overcome by the philistines—They bring the ark into the camp.*

The first words, which relate to Samuel, that his word came to all Israel, have no reference to the following history, as though it was by any direction of his, that the israelites went out against the philistines. His word came to all Israel, that is, people from all parts, who were piously disposed, had recourse to him as a prophet, and advised with him.

Here is an attempt to throw off the yoke of oppression. God had promised that one of them should chase a thousand; but now it was quite contrary, Israel is smitten before the philistines. Sin, the accursed thing, was in the camp, and gave their enemies all the advantage they could wish for. They own the hand of God in their trouble, (so far was right,) It is the Lord that has smitten us. But, instead of submitting, they quarrel with it, and speak angrily at him and his providence, and as not aware of any just provocation they had given him. The foolishness of man perverts his way, and then his heart frets against the Lord, Prov. 19. 3, and finds fault with him. They imagined that they could oblige God to appear for them by bringing the ark into their camp. It is not uncommon for those who are estranged from the vitality of religion, to discover great fondness for the rituals and external observance of it; and for those that even deny the power of godliness, not only to have, but to admire the form of it. The temple of the Lord is cried up, and the ark of the Lord stickled for, with much seeming zeal, by multitudes who have no regard for the Lord of the temple, and the God of the ark; as if concern for the name of christianity would atone for contempt of the christian faith. They were so far from having God's leave to remove

his ark, that he had plainly intimated that when they were settled in Canaan, his ark should be settled in the place that he should choose, Deut. 12. 5, 11, and they must come to it.

When the ark was brought, they thought themselves sure of victory. Carnal people triumph much in the external privileges and performances of religion, and build much upon them, as if those would infallibly save them; and as if the ark, God's throne, in the camp, would bring them to heaven, though the world and the flesh be upon the throne in the heart. The philistines were afraid of the consequences. The name of the God of Israel was formidable even to those that worshipped other gods, and some apprehensions even the infidels had of the danger of contending with him. Natural conscience suggests that those are in a woful condition who have God against them; yet see what gross notions they had of the Divine presence. They had some confused traditions of wonders wrought by or for Israel, when this ark was carried before them, which they attributed, not to Jehovah, but to the ark.

Ver. 10, 11. *The israelites smitten again—The ark taken—Hophni and Phinehas slain.*

Israel was smitten. A good cause often suffers for the sake of the bad men that undertake it. External privileges will secure none that abuse them, and do not live up to them. The ark itself was taken by the philistines, and Hophni and Phinehas were both slain. To this sad event the psalmist refers, Psa. 78. 61, 64. The death of Hophni and Phinehas was no great loss to Israel, but it was a dreadful judgment upon the house of Eli. The word which God had spoken was fulfilled in it, ch. 2. 34. When men leave the way of their duty, they shut themselves out of God's protection. The taking of the ark was a very great judgment upon Israel, and a certain token of God's displeasure against them. They are thus made to see their folly in trusting to their external privileges. Let none think to shelter themselves from the wrath of God, under the cloak of a visible profession, for there will be those cast into utter darkness, that have eaten and drunken in Christ's presence.

Ver. 12—18. *The death of Eli.*

Tidings are brought to Shiloh of the fatal issue of the battle. Now God forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, they hav-

ing driven him from them; and the tribe of Ephraim, which had for 340 years been blessed with the presence of the ark, lost the honour, Psa. 78. 60, 67. This abandoning of Shiloh, Jerusalem is long after reminded of, and bid to take warning by, Jer. 7. 12.

See with what fear Eli expected the tidings! Though old, and blind, and heavy, he placed himself by the way-side, to receive the first intelligence; for his heart trembled for the ark of God. Now the threatening comes to his mind, that he should see an enemy in God's habitation, ch. 2. 32. All good men lay the interests of God's church nearer their hearts than any secular interest or concern of their own, and cannot but be in pain and fear, if at any time those are in peril. How can we be easy, if the ark be not safe?

The account of the defeat of the army, and the slaughter of a great number, was very grievous to Eli as a judge; the tidings of the death of his two sons, of whom he had been so indulgent, and who, he had reason to fear, died impenitent, touched him in a tender part as a father; yet there is a greater concern on his spirit. He does not interrupt the narrative with any passionate lamentations for his sons; but when the messenger concludes his story with, The ark of God is taken, he is struck to the heart, his spirits fail, he swooned away, fell off his seat, and died immediately. Thus did Eli's sun set under a cloud, thus were the folly and wickedness of those sons of his, whom he had indulged, his ruin at last. God sometimes sets marks of his displeasure upon good men in this life, who have misconducted themselves, that others may hear, and fear, and take warning. A man may die miserably, yet not die eternally; may come to an untimely end, yet the end be peace.

Ver. 19—22. *The birth of Ichabod—The death of Phinehas's wife.*

The wife of Phinehas, though married to so wicked a priest, seems to have been a person of piety. The deaths of her father-in-law and her husband hastened her death; but her dying regret was for the captivity of the ark, and the departure of the glory from Israel. What is any earthly joy to one that feels herself dying? No joy but that which is spiritual and divine will stand us in any stead then; death is too serious a thing to admit the

relish of any earthly joy; it is all flat and sapless then. What is it to one that is lamenting the loss of the ark? What pleasure can we take in our creature-comforts and enjoyments, if we want God's word and ordinances, especially if we want the comfort of his gracious presence, and the light of his countenance? With her parting breath she named her child Ichabod, or, "Where is the glory?" The purity and plenty of God's ordinances, and the tokens of his presence in them, are the glory of any people, much more so than their wealth and rank among the nations. Nothing is more cutting, more killing to a faithful israelite, than the want and loss of these. If God go, the glory goes, and all good goes. Woe unto us if he depart. But though the glory is withdrawn from one sinful nation, city, or village after another, yet it shall never depart from Israel, but shall shine forth in one place when eclipsed in another. Jesus, our High Priest, ever liveth to maintain his own cause—the gates of hell shall never prevail against his church, whatever may be the triumphant boasts of his enemies, or the desponding fears of his people.

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1—5. *The philistines set the ark before Dagon—The idol is broken before the ark.*

The philistines placed the ark before Dagon, in the temple of the latter, as a trophy of victory. When they had it in their hands, God restrained them; so that they did not offer any violence to it, did not break it to pieces, as the israelites were ordered to do by the idols of the heathen, but showed respect to it, and carefully carried it to a place of safety. Or, they regarded it as a sacred thing, to which they designed to pay some religious respect, in conjunction with Dagon; for the gods of the heathen were never looked upon as averse to partners.

See the ark's triumph over Dagon. Once and again, Dagon was made to fall before it. If they designed to honour the ark, God hereby showed that he valued not their honour, nor would he accept it; he will be worshipped, not with any god, but above all gods. Thus the kingdom of Satan will certainly fall before the kingdom of Christ, error before truth, profaneness before godliness, and corruption before grace in the hearts of the faithful. When the interests of reli-

gion seem to be ready to sink, yet even then we may be confident that the day of their triumph will come. Great is the truth, and it will prevail.

The next night Dagon fell the second time. The head and hands were cut off upon the threshold, so that nothing remained but the stump, or, as the margin reads it, the fishy part of Dagon. The upper part of this image was in a human shape, the lower in the shape of a fish, as mermaids are painted. Such delusions were idolaters given up to, so vain were they in their imaginations, and so wretchedly darkened were their foolish hearts, as to worship the images, not only of creatures, but of the mere figments of fancy. This they got by setting Dagon in his place again; they had better have let him alone when he was down. But those can speed no better who contend with God, and will set up that which he throws down, Mal. 1. 4. God, by this, magnified his ark and made it honourable, when they vilified it and made it contemptible. He also showed what will be the end of all that which is set up in opposition to him.

The threshold of Dagon's temple was ever after looked upon as sacred, and not to be trodden on. Instead of despising Dagon, for the threshold's sake that beheaded him, they are almost ready to worship the threshold, and will never set their feet on that on which Dagon lost his head. This piece of superstition would help to perpetuate the remembrance of Dagon's disgrace. Thus God would have honour, even out of their superstition. And when Christ, the true Ark of the covenant, really enters the heart of fallen man, which is indeed Satan's temple, every idol will fall, every endeavour to set them up again will be vain, iniquity will be forsaken, and unrighteous gain restored; the Lord will claim and possess the throne. But pride, self-love, and worldly lusts, though dethroned and crucified, still remain within us, like the stump of Dagon. Let us then watch and pray that they may not prevail. Let us seek to have them more entirely destroyed, and let us consider that death is the final destruction of our worst enemy, the sin that dwelleth in us.

Ver. 6—12. *The philistines smitten with diseases.*

The hand of the Lord was heavy upon the philistines; he not only convinced them of their folly, but severely chastised

their insolence. He destroyed them, cut off many of them by sudden death. Those not destroyed, he smote with a painful and shameful disease; by it God humbled their pride, and put contempt upon them, as they had done upon his ark. The men of Ashdod were soon aware it was the hand of God, the God of Israel. Yet they would not renounce Dagon, and submit to God; but instead of making their peace with him, they desired to get clear of the ark, as the gadarenes, who, when they had lost their swine, desired Christ to depart out of their coasts. Carnal hearts, when they smart under the judgments of God, would rather, if it were possible, put him far from them, than enter into covenant and communion with him, and make him their friend. Thus the men of Ashdod resolve, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us.

They were all, at last, weary of the ark, and very willing to be rid of it. A general assembly was called, to advise about sending the ark again to its own place. While they are consulting about it, the hand of God is doing execution; and their contrivances to evade the judgment do but spread it. Those that fight against God will soon have enough of it, and, first or last, will be made to know that none ever hardened their hearts against him, and prospered. Thus men may be convinced, by the judgments of God, that it is vain to contend with him: but nothing, except his renewing grace, will produce genuine repentance, faith, and love, and conversion from every idol to his worship and service. All endeavours to evade his wrath will only increase man's misery, till the sinner be brought to true repentance, or sunk under final condemnation.

CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1—9. *The philistines consult how to send back the ark.*

Seven months the philistines were punished with the presence of the ark; so long it was a plague to them, because they would not send it home sooner. Sinners lengthen out their own miseries by refusing to part with their sins. The israelites made no effort to recover the ark. Alas! where shall we find such concern for religion as prevails above all other considerations? In times of pub-

lic calamity we fear for ourselves, for our families, and for our country; but who cares for the ark of God? We are favoured with the gospel, but it is treated with contempt. We need not wonder if it should be taken from us—to many persons this, though the heaviest of calamities, would occasion no grief. There are multitudes whom any profession would please as well as that of christianity. But there are those who value the house, the word, and the ministry of God, above their richest possessions, who dread the loss of these blessings more than death.—(60.)

When the philistines could no longer endure the painful diseases and the pestilence sent upon them, and the destruction caused by the mice which in some unusual manner had begun to mar their land, they consulted their priests and diviners, whose answer shows the inconsistencies of the human heart in such circumstances. From the tradition of Pharaoh and the egyptians they exhorted the people not to harden their hearts, but to let the ark go. But they did not advise them to renounce idolatry and worship Jehovah; they would ascribe their afflictions to chance rather than to Him, and devised a method to put this to trial, being desirous to keep the ark.

If the ark were restored, they thought trespass-offerings necessary; but their obligations were rather monuments of their shame, and of the Lord's triumph over them. Injured justice demands satisfaction; so far natural light instructed men; but when they began to contrive what that satisfaction should be, they became wretchedly vain in their imaginations. Those who, by wilful sin, have imprisoned the truth in unrighteousness, Rom. 1. 18, as the philistines did the ark, may conclude that there is no making of their peace with him whom they have thus injured, but by a sin-offering; and we know but One that can take away sin.

Their proposal to offer a trespass-offering for their offence, was conformable to Divine revelation at that time; but to send pieces of gold for trespass-offerings, showed them grossly ignorant of the methods of reconciliation appointed by the law of Moses; for there it appears all along, that it is blood, and not gold, that makes atonement for the soul. The inconsistencies and superstitions of idolaters, and the lukewarmness of professing

people, shall ultimately display the glory of God more fully. How willing bad men are to shift off their convictions of the hand of God upon them, and when they are in trouble, to believe it is a chance that happens to them; and if so, the rod has no voice which they are concerned to hear or heed!

Ver. 10—18. *The philistines bring the ark to Beth-shemesh.*

That two kine, which had never been yoked, and were taken from their calves, should draw quietly, without a driver, to a place which was before fixed upon, but where they never had been, certainly was miraculous. The presumption of the philistines in requiring this proof of Jehovah's power was very great. These two kine, says Dr. Lightfoot, knew their owner, their great Owner, Isa. 1. 3, whom Hophni and Phinehas knew not. God's providence is conversant about the motions even of brute creatures, and serves its own purposes by them. The lords of the philistines went after them, wondering at the power of the God of Israel; and thus they who thought to triumph over the ark, were made to go like menial servants after it.

When the reapers saw the ark, they rejoiced; their joy for that was greater than the joy of harvest; they left their work to bid it welcome. Though they had not zeal and courage to attempt the rescue or ransom of it, yet when it did come, they bid it heartily welcome. The return of the ark, and the revival of holy ordinances, after days of restraint and trouble, cannot but be matter of great joy to every faithful israelite. They offered the kine in sacrifice before the ark, for nothing which had been used in this sacred service could lawfully be employed to any common use. Their other sacrifices also were proper expressions of joy and gratitude.

Ver. 19—21. *The people at Beth-shemesh smitten for looking into the ark—They desire its removal to Kirjath-jearim.*

The men of Beth-shemesh looked into the ark of the Lord, though even the high priest himself might not look upon it but once a year. This was to gratify a sinful curiosity of their own, which intruded into things God had thought fit to conceal from them. It is a great affront to God, for vain men to pry into, and meddle with the secret things which belong not to them, Deut. 29. 29; Col.

2. 18. We were all ruined by ambition of forbidden knowledge. That which made this looking into the ark a great sin was, that it proceeded from a low and mean opinion of the ark. Let no man think that service done for God, will justify him in any instance of disrespect or irreverence toward the things of God. It may be, they presumed upon the mean circumstances the ark was then in. It is an offence to God, if we think meanly of his ordinances, because of the meanness of the manner of their administration. Had they looked aright upon the ark, and not judged by outward appearance, they would have thought that the ark never appeared with greater majesty than it did then. It had triumphed over the philistines, and come out of its house of bondage (like Christ out of the grave) by its own power; had they considered this, they would not have looked into it, as a common chest.

See their punishment for this sin. God smote the men of Beth-shemesh, many of them, with a great slaughter. He will not suffer his ark to be profaned. Be not deceived, God is not mocked. They that will not fear his goodness, and reverently use the tokens of his grace, shall be made to feel his justice, and sink under the tokens of his displeasure. Those who pry into what is forbidden, will find it is at their peril. This account of their numbers smitten, is expressed in a very unusual manner in the original, which, beside the improbability, that there should be so many guilty, and so many slain, in one small city, occasions a question whether we take the matter right. Josephus says only seventy were smitten.

Observe the terror produced by this severe stroke upon the men of Beth-shemesh. It speaks their adoration of God, as the Lord God, as a holy Lord God, and as a God before whom none is able to stand. This they infer from that tremendous judgment, "Who is able to stand before the God of the ark?" To stand before God to worship him, blessed be his name! is not impossible; we are through Christ invited, encouraged, and enabled to do it; but to stand before God to contend with him, we are not able. Who is able to stand before the throne of his immediate glory, and look full upon it? 1 Tim. 6. 16. Who is able

to stand before the tribunal of his inflexible justice, and make his part good there? Psa. 130. 3; 143. 2. Who is able to stand before the arm of his provoked power, and either resist or bear the strokes of it? Psa. 76. 7.

They desire to be rid of the ark. They sent messengers to the elders of Kirjath-jearim, a strong city further up in the country, and begged them to come and fetch the ark thither. They stood aloof from it as a dangerous thing. Foolish men run from one extreme to the other, from presumptuous boldness to slavish shyness. They should rather have asked, How may we make our peace with God, and recover his favour? Mic. 6. 6, 7. Thus, when the word of God works with terror on sinners' consciences, they, instead of taking the blame and shame to themselves, quarrel with the word, and put that from them, Jer. 6. 10. Thus many stifle their convictions, and put away salvation from them. The very truths and ordinances of God, which are means of life and salvation to some, become the occasion of deeper condemnation to others. May the Lord give us a spirit of humble fear, filial love, and heavenly hope, that we may be preserved from errors and profit by the salvation of his gospel.

19. The words in the original are, "seventy men, fifties, a thousand men." And according to a system of numeration used by the arabs, this would mean, one thousand, two fifties, and seventy, or 1170. See *Carpenter*. The reader will find some remarks on the numbers mentioned in the historical books of scripture at the close of the book of Esther, page 452.

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1—4. *The ark removed to Kirjath-jearim.*

Kirjath-jearim was not a city of priests, but the inhabitants being convinced that the ark was a pledge of prosperity, and only dangerous when treated with irreverence, were ready to entertain it. It does not appear that Abinadab or his son were priests or levites. When the stated ministers of God's word neglect their duty, and bring a scandal upon their profession, God will employ others to reform the state of religion, and to uphold his worship. External institutions had better be dispensed with, than irreligion be permitted to diffuse its baleful influence.

God will find out a resting-place for

his ark; if some thrust it from them, the hearts of others shall be inclined to receive it. It is no new thing for God's ark to be in a private house. Christ and his apostles preached from house to house, when they could not have public places at their command. The time of the ark's continuance here was long; above forty years it lay in these fields of the wood, a remote, obscure, private place, unfrequented and almost unregarded, till David fetched it thence. Twenty years of this time were passed before the house of Israel was sensible of the want of the ark. The greek version reads it somewhat more clearly than we do; And it was twenty years; that is the time when the whole house of Israel looked up again after the Lord; though, while it was absent from the tabernacle, the token of God's special presence was wanting, nor could they keep the day of atonement as it should be kept. They were content with the altars without the ark; so easily can formal professors rest satisfied in a round of external performances, without any tokens of God's presence or acceptance. But at length they bethought themselves, and began to lament after the Lord, stirred up to it, it is probable, by the preaching of Samuel, with which an extraordinary working of the Spirit of God set in. A general disposition to repentance and reformation appeared throughout all Israel, and they began to look unto Him whom they had slighted, and to mourn, Zech. 12. 10.

We must suppose that during this time the prophet Samuel laboured incessantly and successfully throughout the land, to revive true religion. When he had brought numbers of the people to a sense of their sin and of their duty, he urged the heads of the tribes to unite in public reformation and re-establishment of the worship of Jehovah. The few words used are very expressive; and we may pronounce this to have been one of the most effectual revivals of religion which ever took place in Israel.

Ver. 5, 6. *The israelites, by means of Samuel, solemnly repent at Mizpeh.*

They drew water and poured it out before the Lord: signifying their humiliation and contrition for sin; owning themselves as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again, 2 Sam. 14. 14, so mean, so miserable, before God, Psa. 22. 14. The chaldee reads it,

They poured out their hearts in repentance before the Lord. They wept rivers of tears, and sorrowed after a godly sort, for it was before the Lord. The soul is, in prayer, poured out before God, *Psa.* 62. 8. They thus expressed their willingness to part with all their sins, and to retain no more of them than the vessel does of the water that is poured out of it. They were free and full in their confession, and fixed in their resolution to cast away from them all their transgressions. Some think it signifies their joy in the hope of God's mercy, which Samuel had assured them of. This ceremony was used with that signification at the feast of tabernacles, *John* 7. 37, 38, and see *Isa.* 12. 3. Taking it in this sense, it must be read, they drew water after they had fasted. In the close of their humiliation, they thus expressed their hope of pardon and reconciliation. They fasted, abstained from food, afflicted their souls, so expressing repentance and exciting devotion. They made a public confession, We have sinned against the Lord, so giving glory to God, and taking shame to themselves. And if we thus confess our sins, we shall find our God faithful and just to forgive us our sins. On this occasion Samuel seems first to have been publicly acknowledged as a judge of Israel.

Ver. 7—12. While Samuel offers up prayers and sacrifices the Lord discomfits the philistines.

The philistines invaded Israel, perhaps taking umbrage from that general meeting for repentance and prayer, as if it had been a rendezvous for war. When sinners begin to repent and reform, they must expect that Satan will muster all his force against them, and set his instruments on work to the utmost, to oppose and discourage them. But good is, at length, brought out of that evil. The philistines could not have acted with less policy, than to make war upon Israel at this time, when they were making peace with God. Israel were unarmed, unprepared for war, come together to fast and pray, not to fight; prayers and tears being all the weapons they are furnished with, to these they have recourse. They earnestly beg Samuel to pray for them. He had promised them deliverance from the philistines, and they had been observant of him, in all that he had spoken to them from the Lord. Thus they who sincerely submit to Christ, as their Law-

giver and Judge, need not doubt of their interest in his intercession. At all seasons he pleads his own atoning blood in the behalf of all who come to God through him. Oh what a comfort is it to all believers, that our great Intercessor above never ceases, is never silent! for he always appears in the presence of God for us.

Samuel intercedes with God for them, and does it by sacrifice. He made intercession with a sacrifice. Christ intercedes in the virtue of his satisfaction, and in all our prayers we must look to his great oblation, depending upon that for audience and acceptance. Samuel's sacrifice, without his prayer, had been an empty shadow, his prayer without the sacrifice had not been so prevalent; but both together teach us, what great things we may expect from God, in answer to the prayers made with faith in Christ's sacrifice. It was a burnt-offering, offered purely for the glory of God; so intimating that the great plea he relied on in his prayer was taken from the honour of God. It was but one sucking lamb that he offered; for it is the integrity and intention of the heart that God looks at, more than the bulk or number of the offerings. This one lamb (typifying the Lamb of God) was more acceptable than thousands of rams or bullocks would have been without faith and prayer. God gave a gracious answer to Samuel's prayer. The philistines were totally routed, and that in such a manner as highly magnified the prayer of Samuel, the power of God, and the valour of Israel. How soon they found the benefit of their repentance, reformation, and return to God! Now they have thus engaged him, none of their enemies can stand before them. And Samuel erected a memorial of this victory, to the glory of God, and for the encouragement of Israel. He set up an Eben-ezer, "the stone of help." Observe the reason he gives for the name is, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. The beginnings of mercy and deliverance are to be acknowledged with thankfulness, though they be not completely finished; nay, though the issue seem uncertain. Having obtained help from God, I continue hitherto, says Paul, *Acts* 26. 22.

Through successive generations, the church of God has had cause to set up Eben-ezers for renewed deliverances;

neither outward persecutions nor internal corruptions have prevailed against her, because "hitherto the Lord hath helped her:" and he will help, even to the end of the world.

Ver. 13—17. *The philistines subdued—Samuel peaceably and religiously judgeth Israel.*

After this success, the philistines were constrained to restore to Israel such cities as they had seized, and though we do not suppose that the israelites entered into treaty with the amorites who dwelt amongst them, they were so kept under as to create them no disturbance. It is remarkable that in this great revival of true religion the ark was neither removed to Shiloh, nor placed with the tabernacle in any other situation. The sanctuary service, probably, was either neglected or improperly conducted during this interval, and the more pious israelites preferred joining with Samuel in the worship, which, being a prophet, by Divine direction he conducted near his own house. This disregard to the levitical institutions intimated that their typical meaning formed their chief use; and when that was overlooked, they became a lifeless service not to be compared with repentance, faith, and the love of God and man.

Every believer should review these deliverances with admiring gratitude. Looking back to his own experience, he will find an abridgment of the same history. Notwithstanding the deceitfulness of his heart, and the struggles of his lusts, through seasons of slackness and revival; through many transgressions, corrections, deliverances, and relapses; through fears, conflicts, and difficulties, he hath still been preserved and kept from evil, and his enemies subdued; for hitherto the Lord hath helped him. If this be our happy case, let us raise to the Lord our Ebenezer in unreserved praise; let us renew our application to God our Saviour for increased strength in our own soul, and let us speak to the encouragement of others, that they may be animated to trust in the Lord.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ver. 1—3. *The ill government of Samuel's sons.*

As we do not find Samuel censured for the ill conduct of his sons, we may infer that he had educated them properly, and that they appeared qualified for the of-

fice of judges, and were appointed to it for the good of the people, not because they were his sons, or from a desire to secure the government to his family. But alas! his sons walked not in his ways. A good extraction is a reproach to him that degenerates from it. Those who have the most grace themselves, cannot give grace to their children. It does not appear that Samuel's sons were so profane and vicious as Eli's sons; but they were corrupt judges, they turned aside after lucre. The love of money is the root of all evil. Samuel had taken no bribes, ch. 12. 3, but his sons did, and then they perverted judgment.

What added to the grievance of the people was, they were threatened by an invasion from Nahash, king of the amonites, who actually entered the hebrew territories, ch. 12. 12. Instead of applying to God, who had so often wonderfully appeared for them, and was their King and Governor, the elders came to Samuel in a peremptory manner, as we find in the following verses.—(13.)

Ver. 4—9. *The israelites ask for a king—God willeth Samuel to yield to the people.*

The israelites were more displeased at the injury to their temporal interests, than by all the dishonour done to God by the impious wickedness of Eli's sons. There had been many fairer occasions to ask for a king. Discontent, fondness for change, and a desire of outward splendour, are natural to man; they follow him from the cradle to the grave, unless subdued by Divine grace. No change can cure this, the same dissatisfaction with the present situation, whatever it may be, is felt, the comfort of some other is ignorantly imagined. When the mind is thus disposed, any circumstance will serve as a pretext for seeking gratifications.

Samuel was displeased; not when they upbraided him with his own infirmities, and his children's irregularities, he could patiently bear what reflected on himself, and his own family; but it displeased him when they said, Give us a king to judge us, because that reflected upon God. It drove him to his knees; he gave no answer for the present, but took time to consider of what they proposed, and prayed to the Lord for direction, spreading the case before him, leaving it with him, and so making himself easy. Samuel was much in prayer, and we are encouraged

in every thing to make our requests known to God, Phil. 4. 6. When any thing disturbs us, it is our interest, as well as duty, to show our trouble before God.

God tells him, he must not think it hard, that they had put this slight upon him, for they had herein put a slight upon God himself. They have not rejected thee only, but they have rejected me. If God interests himself in the indignities that are done us, and the contempts put upon us, we may well afford to bear them patiently; nor need we think the worse of ourselves, if for his sake we bear reproach, Psa. 69. 7, but rather rejoice, and count it an honour, Col. 1. 24. The government of Israel hitherto had been, in a more peculiar manner than ever any government was, a Theocracy, a Divine government; their judges had their call and commission immediately from God; the affairs of their nation were under his peculiar conduct. As the constitution, so the administration of their government, was by, "Thus saith the Lord." But of this method they were weary, though it was their honour and safety, so long as they kept in with God.

In reality the demand of the people was treasonable, as it was throwing off the immediate government of God, and as it expressed a desire of being like other nations, which above all things they should have avoided, and which was the cause of their final ruin. Their rejecting the Theocracy introduced despotism and slavery.—(13.)

The Lord reigned over Israel when they had kings, but not in such a peculiar manner as by the judges, who were generally raised and called by God's special appointment, endowed and sanctified by his Spirit, directed and assisted by his special providence upon all emergencies, whereas all things were for the most part contrary in their kings.—(54.)

Samuel is to tell them that they shall have a king. Not that God was pleased with their request, but as sometimes he crosses us in love, so at other times he gratifies us in wrath; he did so here. God knows how to bring glory to himself, out of it, and serves his own wise purposes, even by their foolish counsels.

Ver. 10—22. *Samuel tells the people the manner of a king.*

Samuel must tell them, that they will repent of their choice. If they would have a king to rule them, as the eastern

kings ruled their subjects, they would find the yoke exceedingly heavy. They looked only at the pomp and magnificence of a king, and thought that would make their nation great and considerable among its neighbours; but he must bid them consider, how they would bear the charges of that pomp, and endure that arbitrary power, which the neighbouring kings assumed. Those that set their hearts inordinately upon any thing in this world, ought to consider the inconveniences, as well as conveniences, that will attend it. Those that submit themselves to the government of the world and the flesh, are told plainly, what hard masters they are, and what a tyranny the dominion of sin is; yet they will exchange God's government for it.

Samuel faithfully delivered God's mind. He lays before the people, very particularly, what would be, not the right of a king in general, but the manner of the king that should reign over them, according to the pattern of the nations. Samuel does not speak of a just and honest right of a king to do these things, for his right is quite otherwise described in that part of the law of Moses, which concerns the king's duty, but such a right as the kings of the nations had then acquired. The law of God and the manner of men widely differ from each other; the former should be our rule in the several relations of life; the latter should be the measure of our expectations from others. These would be their grievances, and, when they complained to God, he would not hear them. When we bring ourselves into distress by our own irregular desires and projects, we justly forfeit the comfort of prayer, and the benefit of Divine aids.

The people were obstinate in their demand. They could not stay God's time. God had intimated to them in the law, that, in due time, Israel should have a king, Deut. 17. 14, 15. Could they but have waited, all the calamities that attended the setting up of Saul had been prevented. Sudden resolves and hasty desires make work for a long and leisurely repentance. Their aim in desiring a king was, that they might be like the nations, have one to judge them, to go out before them, and to fight their battles. Foolish people and unwise! what was the issue? Their first king was slain in a battle, which none of their

judges ever were. Samuel's rehearsing their words in the ears of the Lord, intimates that it was done in private. Yet amidst all this evil, the people showed great respect to Samuel. They sought his counsel and concurrence, and upon an intimation that a king should be given them, they were willing to wait. The history of the world cannot produce another instance in which the public determination was to appoint a king, yet no one was proposed, but the determination entirely referred to God.

Magistracy is God's appointment and a great blessing; and as every form is liable to abuses, our wisdom is to be thankful for the advantages, and patient under the disadvantages of the government we may live under, and to pray continually for our rulers, that they may govern us in the fear of God, and that we may live under them in all godliness and honesty. And it is a hopeful symptom when our desire of worldly objects can brook delay; and when we can refer the time and manner of their being granted, to God's providence.

11—18. Here is a striking representation of eastern despotism, as it exists even to the present day.

CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 1—10. *Parentage of Saul—Saul, when seeking his father's asses, is brought to Samuel.*

Saul was the son of Kish, "a mighty man of power," and by his engaging and majestic appearance he seemed likely to conciliate esteem, and to command respect, with a nation that was fond of pomp and grandeur.—(60.)

Saul, though married, and he had children grown up, lived in his father's house, and was subject to him. Saul readily went to seek his father's asses. This is to be ascribed to the plainness and simplicity of those times. His obedience to his father was commendable. Seest thou a man diligent in his business, dutiful to his superiors, and willing to take pains; he does, as Saul, stand fair for preferment. When he could not find the asses, he determined to return, being apprehensive that his aged father would begin to fear that some mischief had befallen them. Children should take care that they do nothing to grieve or frighten their parents. His servant proposed, that since they were now at Ramah, they should call on Samuel, and take his advice in this affair. Wherever we are, we

should improve our opportunities of acquainting ourselves with those who are wise and good. But there are many that will consult a man of God, if he comes in their way, that would not go a step out of their way to get wisdom.

The servant spoke very respectfully concerning Samuel, though he had no knowledge of him, but by common report. Men of God are honourable men, and should be so in our eyes. Acquaintance with the things of God, and serviceableness to the kingdom of God, put true honour upon men, and make them great. All he saith, comes surely to pass. This was observed concerning him, when he was a young prophet, ch. 3. 19, and it still held true. But all the use Saul and his servant would make of the man of God, was, to be advised by him, whether they should return home, or, if there was yet any hopes of finding the asses, which way they must go next; a poor business to employ a prophet about! The proposal to make prophecy serve for so mean an object as this, discovered what manner of spirit they were of. We sensibly feel temporal losses and bestow much pains to retrieve them: but how little do we attempt, and how soon are we weary in seeking the salvation of our souls! If ministers could inform men how to secure their property, or to get wealth, they would be more consulted and honoured than they now are, though employed in teaching them how to escape eternal misery, and to obtain eternal life. Most people would rather be told their fortune than their duty.

Saul was thoughtful what present they should bring to the man of God. It was agreeable to the general usage of those times. Samuel needed not their money, nor would he have denied his advice, if they had not brought it; but they brought it him as a token of respect, and of the value they put upon his office. The historian here notices the name then given to the prophets, they called them Seers, or seeing men. Those who are prophets, must be seers, they that undertake to speak to others of the things of God, must have an insight into those things themselves.

If the rejection of Samuel was a rejection of God, what must a rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ be! and yet how many there are who say of him, We will not have this man to reign over us. Beware

then how you presume to set aside the authority of Christ, or to place a rival on his throne. God may give us our own way; but it will be a curse to us and not a blessing.

7, 8. It is still the custom in the east for an inferior never to address a superior, or to request any favour from him, without offering a present proportioned to his ability, if it is only a few dates. It is offered as a token of respect, not as a recompence. The present was about 9*d.* of our money. *Chandler* observes, It is not to be considered as the price of divination, but as an offering of respect to the chief magistrate in Israel.

Ver. 11—17. *Samuel informed of God concerning Saul.*

When the sacrifice was offered, which was the ceremony, Samuel blessed it, that is, he prayed over it, and offered up spiritual sacrifices with it, which were the substance; and afterward, when the holy duties were performed, they did eat. Let the soul first be served. The feast upon the sacrifice being a sacred rite, it was requisite it should in a particular manner be blessed. They feasted, in token of their reconciliation to God by virtue of the sacrifice, and their participation of the benefits of it; and Samuel blessed it, that is, he prayed to God to grace the solemnity with his special presence, that it might answer all those great ends. Doubtless this was the observance in all sacrifices at the tabernacle and temple, when true religion flourished, though at other times it degenerated into a form.

The very maid-servants of the city could give direction to the prophet. They had heard of the sacrifice, and could tell of the necessity of Samuel's presence. Where there is practice and example of piety in the better sort, there will be a reflection of it upon the meanest. It is no small benefit to live in religious and holy places; we shall be much to blame if all goodness fall beside us.—(34.) And we should always be ready to give assistance to those who are inquiring after God's prophets, and to further them in their inquiries.

Samuel, by an extraordinary revelation, had been informed concerning Saul. The hebrew phrase is, God uncovered the ear of Samuel; to which some allude as explaining the way of God's revealing himself to us; he not only speaks, but uncovers our ear. We have naturally a covering on our ears, so that we perceive not what God says, Job 33. 14, but when God will manifest himself to a soul, he

uncovers the ear, says, Ephphatha, Be opened; he takes the veil from off the heart, 2 Cor. 3. 16.

Though God had, in displeasure, granted their request for a king, yet here he speaks tenderly of Israel; for even in wrath he remembers mercy. He calls them again and again His people; though a provoking people, yet His still. He sends them a man to be captain over them, to save them out of the hand of the philistines. He does it with a gracious respect to them and to their cry. Though he would not hear their cry to relieve them against the oppression of their kings, ch. 8. 18, yet he was so gracious as to make those kings instruments of their deliverance from the oppression of their neighbours; which was more than they had reason to expect.

Ver. 18—27. *Samuel's treatment of Saul.*

True grace will teach us to honour those whom God hath honoured, though their advancement be attended with humiliation to ourselves; but it is always right so to regulate that respect as to bring them acquainted with the truths and worship of God.

The best portion was set apart for Saul, as the chief guest, whom Samuel had expected before he came. All the circumstances relative to this interview, were calculated to prepare Saul's mind for what followed, and to show him the interposition of God therein. Samuel, that good prophet, was so far from envying Saul, or bearing him any ill-will, that he was the first and most forward to do him honour, in compliance with the will of God. Both that evening and early the next morning, Samuel communed with Saul upon the flat roof of the house. We may suppose Samuel now satisfied Saul that he was the person God had pitched upon for the government; and gave him assurance of his own willingness to resign. Early in the morning, he sent him toward home, brought him part of the way, bade him send his servant before, that they might be private; and there, as we find, he anointed him, and therein showed him the word of the Lord, that is, gave him full satisfaction that he was the person chosen to be king by that sacred rite. It is by the unction of the Holy Ghost, that Christ, the great Prophet, shows us the word of the Lord, 1 John 2. 27; the same anointing teacheth of all things.

How different are the purposes of the Lord for us from our intentions for ourselves! Perhaps Saul was the only one who ever went out to seek asses, and literally found a kingdom; but many have set out and moved their habitations to seek riches and pleasures, who have been guided to places where they found salvation for their souls!—where they met with those who addressed them as if aware of the secrets of their lives and hearts, and thereby were led seriously to regard the message of the Lord delivered by them! If this has been our case, though our worldly plans have been frustrated, let us not care for that, for the Lord has given us, or has prepared us for, what is infinitely better.

CHAPTER X.

Ver. 1—8. *Samuel anoints Saul.*

Samuel, by anointing Saul, assured him it was God's act to make him king. The high priest was anointed to his office, which signified the conferring of those gifts upon him, that were requisite for the discharge of his office; and the same was intimated in the anointing of kings. These sacred unctions, then used, pointed at the great Messiah, or anointed One, the King of the church, and High Priest of our profession, who was anointed with the oil of the Spirit, not by measure, but without measure, and above all the priests and princes of the Jewish church.

For Saul's further satisfaction, Samuel gives him some signs which should come to pass the same day. They were such as would not only confirm the word of Samuel in general, and prove him a true prophet, but would confirm the word to Saul that he should be king. The first place he directs him to was a sepulchre, the sepulchre of one of his ancestors; there he must be reminded of his own mortality, and now that he had a crown before him, must think of his grave, in which all his honour would be laid in the dust.

In that state of the levitical institutions, there were high-places for religious worship. The persons carrying peace-offerings to Bethel were inclined by God to give two loaves as a present to Saul as their newly anointed king. But the most remarkable sign would be his joining a company of prophets, under the influence of a spirit of prophecy which

should at that time come upon him. What God works in us by his Spirit, serves much more to confirming faith, than any thing wrought for us by his providence. These prophets were not divinely inspired to foretell things to come, but employed themselves in the study of the law, in instructing their neighbours, and in the acts of piety, especially in praising God, wherein they were assisted by the Spirit of God. It was happy for Israel that they had companies of prophets, who gave them good instructions, and set them good examples, and helped to keep up religion among them, when the priests and levites had so generally neglected their duty. From the time of Samuel there appears to have been schools or places where pious young men were brought up in the knowledge of Divine things. Music was then used as a means to dispose the mind to receive the impressions of the good Spirit, 2 Kings 3. 15. These prophets had been at the high-place, probably, offering sacrifice. We should come from holy ordinances with our hearts greatly enlarged in holy joy and praise; see Psa. 138. 5. Saul should find himself strongly moved to join with them, and should be turned into another man from what he had been while he lived in a private capacity. The Spirit of God, by his ordinances, changes men, wonderfully transforms them. Saul, by praising God in the communion of saints, became another man; but whether a new man or not, may be questioned.

A standing rule was given for Saul to observe while Samuel and he lived. That in case of difficulties, when they were separate from each other, Saul should resort to Gilgal, call the people thither, and tarry there seven days for the gathering of the people, and the coming of Samuel.

Though this is related as only done once, ch. 13, Josephus affirms it was constantly practised upon all such occasions.—(54.)

1. There was no divine law for anointing kings but it was an ancient custom. See Judg. 9. 8.

5. By prophets here, and in the like places, is understood persons that wholly devoted themselves to religious studies and exercises, such as preaching, praying, praising of God, &c. For the term "prophesying" is not only given to the most eminent act of it, namely, foretelling things to come, but also to preaching, Rom. 12. 6; 1 Cor. 14. 31, 32; 1 Thess. 5. 20; and to the making or singing of psalms or songs of praise to God, 1 Chron. 25. 1—3. They that wholly attended upon these things are called sons of the prophets, who were united in companies or col-

leges, as 2 Kings 2, that they might the more conveniently edify and assist one another in God's work; which institution God was pleased so far to honour and bless, that sometimes he communicated to them the knowledge of future things, 2 Kings 2. 3, 5.—*Poole.*

Ver. 9—16. *Saul prophesies—He returns home.*

The signs Samuel had given Saul, punctually came to pass; he found that God had given him another heart, another disposition of mind; he was inspired with fortitude and resolution, his mind enlarged to the deliverance of Israel, and the designs of government. Perhaps also he was brought under religious impressions, which might be termed another, though not a new heart. His conduct for a time appeared promising. If he advance to another station, he will give another heart, to those who sincerely desire to serve him with their power. His prophesying was publicly noticed. Saul among the prophets is a wonder, to a proverb. Let not the worst be despaired of, yet let not external show of devotion, and a sudden change for the present, be too much relied on; Saul among the prophets was Saul still.

His being anointed was kept private, for he industriously concealed it. When he had done prophesying, he went to the high-place, to give God thanks for his mercies to him, and to pray for the continuance of those mercies. This was an instance of his humility, of his prudence, and of his dependence upon God. He leaves it to God to carry on his own work by Samuel, and, for his own part, sits still, to see how the matter will fall.

Ver. 17—27. *Saul chosen king.*

The people met in a solemn assembly, in which God was in a peculiar manner present; therefore it is said they were called together unto the Lord. Samuel shows how happy they had been under the Divine government. He likewise declares what an affront they had put upon God, who had himself saved them out of all their tribulations, by his own power, and by such as he had immediately called and qualified, in desiring a king to save them. He tells them, in plain terms, Ye have this day rejected your God. Those who can live better by sense than by faith, that stay themselves upon an arm of flesh rather than upon the Almighty arm, forsake a Fountain of living waters for broken cisterns. Some make the obstinacy of the Jews in this matter to be a presage of their rejecting Christ, in

casting off whom they cast off God, that he should not reign over them.

He puts them upon choosing their king by lot. By this method it would appear to the people, as it already appeared to Samuel, that Saul was appointed of God to be king, for the disposal of the lot is of the Lord. It would also prevent all disputes and exceptions, for the lot causeth contention to cease, and parteth between the mighty. When the tribe of Benjamin was taken, they might easily foresee that they were setting up a family that would soon be put down again, for dying Jacob had by the spirit of prophecy entailed the dominion upon Judah, Gen. 49. 10. Those, therefore, that knew the scriptures, could not be pleased at that which they foresaw must be undone again.

So little fond was Saul now of that power, which soon after, when he possessed it, he could not, without the utmost indignation, think of parting with, that he withdrew. We may suppose he was at this time really averse to take upon him the government. It is good to be conscious of our unworthiness and insufficiency for the services to which we are called; but men should not go into the contrary extreme, by refusing the employments to which the Lord and the church call them.

The congregation, believing that choice well made which God himself made, would leave no way untried to find him out on whom the lot fell; and the Lord directed where they should find him. Samuel presented him to the people, and they accepted him. He settled the contract between them, and leaves it upon record. The greater part of the people treated the matter with indifference. Saul modestly went home to his own house, but was attended by a band of men whose hearts God disposed to support his authority. They were those whose hearts God had touched to do their duty. Whatever good is in us, or is done by us at any time, it must be ascribed to the grace of God. If the heart bend at any time the right way, it is because he has touched it. One touch is enough when it is Divine. There were others that despised him, and said, How shall this man save us? Thus differently are men affected to our exalted Redeemer. God hath set him King upon the holy hill of Zion. There is a remnant who submit to him, rejoice in him, and follow him wherever he goes; they are

such whose hearts God has touched, whom he has made willing in the day of his power. But there are others who despise him, who ask, How shall this man save us? They are offended in him, stumble at his external meanness, and they will be broken.

Saul held his peace; "He was as though he had been deaf." He was so far from resenting the neglect of the people, that he seemed not to notice it; which was evidence, both of his humility, and the mercifulness of his disposition—at that time. Christ held his peace when he was affronted, for it was the day of his patience; but there is a day of recompence coming. We should wait the Lord's will with patience, and without discouragement, and bear scorn and malice in silent meekness, attending to the duties of our station. Thus the fatal effects of discord will be prevented. In due season the Lord will plead our cause, and all opposition will fall before us.

CHAPTER XI.

Ver. 1--4. *Distress of the people of Jabesh-gilead.*

The first fruit of Saul's government, was the rescue of Jabesh-gilead out of the hands of the ammonites. Let not Israel thence infer that they did well to ask a king; God could and would have saved them without one; but let them admire God's goodness that he did not reject them when they rejected him, let them acknowledge his wisdom in the choice of the person, whom, if he did not find fit, yet he made fit, for the great trust he called him to, and enabled, in some measure, to merit the crown by his public services.

The city of Jabesh-gilead had been destroyed by Israel's sword of justice, for not appearing against the wickedness of Gibeah, Judges 21. 10; now, being re-peopled, it is in danger of being destroyed by the ammonites. Hasty settlements among bad neighbours often produce multiplied calamities, and when professed christians act inconsistently with the covenant of God, they may expect to be forced to the basest subjection to man. To save their lives men will part with their liberty, and even consent to have their eyes put out; is it then no wisdom to part with our right eye, or that sin which is equally dear to us, rather than to be cast into hell fire?

Ver. 5—11. *Saul collects an army, and delivers Jabesh-gilead.*

Saul, finding himself despised by some of the israelites, and neglected by most of them, had returned quietly to his former occupations, and left the matter entirely to the providence of God. The Lord will bring forth those whom he has designed and prepared for usefulness; nor will any repent of humbly waiting in obscurity and honest industry till He is pleased to call them forth. Saul was zealous for the safety and honour of Israel, and exerted his authority and power upon this important occasion. He sent a summons to all the coasts of Israel. The effect of his summons was, that the nation came out as one man, and the reason given is, Because the fear of the Lord fell upon them. They were influenced to observe his orders by the fear of God, and a regard to him who had made Saul their king, and them members one of another. Religion and the fear of God make men good subjects, and good friends to the public interests of their country. Those who fear God, will make conscience of their duty to all men, particularly to their rulers.

See his faith and confidence, and, grounded thereon, his courage and resolution, in this enterprise. Saul knew he had a just cause, a clear call, and God on his side, therefore doubted not of success. This was good news to the besieged gileadites. When they heard it, they were glad, relying on the assurances that were sent them. See also his industry and close application to this business. When the Spirit of the Lord comes upon men, it will make them expert, even without experience. With a vast multitude, assembled with extraordinary quickness, he undertook and performed a long march in a very short period, and arrived in time to rescue the people of Jabesh-gilead, and to destroy their enemies. When zeal for the glory of God and love for the brethren prompts men to earnest and vigorous efforts, and when God is pleased to help, great effects may speedily be produced.

Ver. 12—15. *Saul is confirmed in his kingdom.*

The people took this occasion to show their jealousy for the honour of Saul, and their resentment of the indignities done him. Samuel, it seems, was present, and to him, as judge, the motion was made, that the sons of Belial who would not

have Saul to reign over them, should be brought forth and slain. Saul took this occasion to give further proofs of his clemency; he declared, There shall not a man be put to death this day. 1. Because it was a day of joy and triumph; To-day the Lord has wrought salvation in Israel; since God has been so good to us all, let us not be harsh one to another. 2. Because he hoped they were now convinced that he, under God, could save them. They now honoured him whom they had despised; and, if an enemy be made a friend, that is more to our advantage than to have him slain. All good princes consider that power is for edification, not for destruction. Samuel took this occasion to call the people together before the Lord in Gilgal, that they might publicly give God thanks for their late victory, and that they might confirm Saul in the government, more solemnly than had been yet done, that he might not retire again to obscurity.

The once despised Saviour will at length be universally acknowledged as the Lord's own anointed King. As yet, upon his mercy-seat, he receives the submission of rebels, and even pleads their cause; but shortly, from his righteous tribunal, he will condemn to everlasting ruin all those who persist in their contempt of him, and their opposition to him.

CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1—5. *Samuel testifies his integrity.*

The elders and tribes of Israel being convened at Gilgal, Samuel appealed to the people concerning his integrity as their judge. By this he not only cleared his own character, but set an instructive example before Saul, while he convinced the people of their ingratitude to God and to himself. He had spent his days in their service; he began betimes to be useful among them, and had long continued so. As for his sons, Behold, says he, they are with you; you may, if you please, call them to an account for any thing they have done amiss. They are with you, subjects to the new king as well as you; if you prove them guilty of any wrong, you may punish them, and oblige them to make restitution. As for your new king, I have hearkened to your voice in all that ye said to me. Now you have made yourselves like the nations in your civil government, and have cast off

the Divine administration in that, take heed lest you make yourselves like the nations in religion, and cast off the worship of God.

He solemnly appeals to them concerning his own integrity in the administration of the government. There is a just debt which every man owes to his own good name, especially men in public stations, which is, to guard it against unjust aspersions and suspicions, that we may finish our course with honour, as well as with joy. The honourable testimony borne to Samuel's integrity is left upon record to his honour; The Lord is witness, who searcheth the heart; and the king, his anointed, is witness, who trieth overt acts; and the people agree to it, He is witness. The testimony of our neighbours, and especially the testimony of our own consciences for us, that we have in our places lived honestly, will be our comfort, under the slights and contempts that may be put upon us.

Ver. 6—15. *Samuel reproves the ingratitude of the people.*

Samuel gives an abstract of the history of the nation, that, by the consideration of the great things God had done, they might be for ever engaged to love him and serve him. The work of ministers is to reason with people; not only to exhort and direct, but to persuade, to convince men's judgments, and so to gain their wills and affections. He reasons of the righteous acts of the Lord, "both the benefits he hath bestowed upon you, in performance of his promises, and the punishments he has inflicted on you for your sins." Samuel mentions himself, not to his own praise, but to the honour of God, who made him an instrument of subduing the philistines.

At last, he puts them in mind of God's late favour to the present generation, in gratifying them with a king, when they would prescribe to God, and by such a one saving them out of the hand of Nahash king of Ammon. Here it appears that that was the immediate occasion of their desiring a king. God did not cast them off, when they, in effect, cast him off. And let them not think that they had cut themselves off from all dependence upon God. He tells them plainly that their obedience to God would be their happiness. Their privileges, as the Lord's peculiar people, would be continued to them, as they had been by their

adhering to his service, not otherwise. To those who are sincere in religion, God will give grace to persevere; those who follow God faithfully, God will enable to continue following him. Their disobedience would as certainly be their ruin. We mistake if we think that we can evade God's justice by shaking off his dominion. If God shall not rule us, yet he will judge us.

11. Perhaps Bedan guarded and delivered them on one side, at the same time when some other of the judges appeared and acted for them on another side. Some think he was the same with Jair; others, the same with Samson, who was Ben-Dan, a son of Dan, of that tribe, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, Be-Dan in Dan, in the camp of Dan.—*Henry*. Other ancient versions have Jerubbaal, and Barak, and Jephthah, and Samson, which appears the most correct reading.

Ver. 16—25. *Thunder sent in harvest time.*

Samuel aims to convince the people of their sin in desiring a king. Though we meet with prosperity and success in the way of sin, yet we must not therefore think the more favourably of it. We must never think well of that which God in his law frowns upon, though in his providence he seem to smile upon it.

Observe the expressions of God's displeasure. At Samuel's word God sent thunder and rain upon them, at a season of the year when, in that country, the like was not seen. This was designed by the almighty power of God to convince them that they had done very wickedly in asking a king; not only by its coming at an unusual time, in wheat harvest, and on a fair, clear day, when there appeared not to the eye any signs of a storm, but by his giving notice of it before. The event proved him a true prophet; the sign and wonder came to pass. Samuel called unto the Lord, and in answer to his prayer, even while he was yet speaking, The Lord sent thunder and rain. By this, Samuel made it to appear, not only what powerful influence God has upon this earth, but also what powerful interest he himself had in heaven, that God would thus hearken to the voice of a man, Josh. 10. 14.

By this extraordinary thunder and rain, God testified displeasure against them in the same way in which he had formerly testified it, and at the prayer of Samuel also, against the philistines, ch. 7. 10. Now that Israel rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit, he turned to be their enemy, and fought against them with the same

weapons which, not long before, had been employed against their adversaries, Isa. 63. 10. He showed their folly in desiring a king to save them, rather than God, or Samuel, promising themselves more from an arm of flesh, than from the arm of God, or from the power of prayer. Could their prince command such forces as the prophet could by his prayers? He intimated that however serene and prosperous their condition seemed to be, now they had a king, like the weather in wheat harvest, yet, if God pleased, he could change the face of their heavens, and persecute them with his tempest, as the psalmist speaks.

Observe the impression this made upon the people. It startled them very much. They own their sin and folly in desiring a king. Some people will not be brought to see their sins by any gentler methods than storms and thunders. They entreat Samuel to pray for them. Now they see their need of him whom a while ago they slighted. Thus many who will not have Christ to reign over them, would yet be glad to have him intercede for them, to turn away the wrath of God. The time may come when those who despise and ridicule praying people, will value their prayers, and desire a share in them, saying, Pray to the Lord thy God; we know not how to call him ours, but if thou hast any interest in him, improve it for us.

Samuel aims to confirm the people in their religion, and to engage them for ever to cleave unto the Lord. The design of his discourse resembles those of Joshua, Josh. 23. and 24. He would not that the terrors of the Lord should frighten them from him. God's just rebukes must not drive us from hope in his mercy. The fixedness of God's choice is owing to the freeness of it; we may therefore hope he will not forsake his people, because it has pleased him to make them his people. He cautions against idolatry. Idols are enmity and a lie. Whatever we make a god of, we shall find it deceive us. Creatures in their own place are good; but when put in God's place, they are vain things.

He comforts them with assurance that he would continue his care and concern for them. They asked it as a favour; he promised it as a duty. It is a sin against God not to pray for the Israel of God, especially for those that are under our

charge; and good men fear the guilt of omissions. They asked him to pray for them at this time, and upon this occasion; but he promises to continue his prayers for them, and not to cease as long as he lived. Our rule is, to pray without ceasing; we sin if we restrain prayer in general, and in particular if we cease praying for the church. They asked him only to pray for them; but he promises to do more, to teach them; he would not deny them his instructions as a prophet.

This illustrious prophet, like Moses, was mighty to intercede for his backsliding people, and has placed the duty of public intercession on its firmest basis; the *sin* incurred by the ministers of religion and the guardians of the state, by neglecting it.—(35.)

Samuel concludes with an earnest exhortation to practical religion and serious godliness. The great duty here pressed is, to fear the Lord. He had said, Fear not with a slavish fear; but here, Fear the Lord with a filial fear. As the fruit and evidence of this, serve him in the duties of religious worship, and of a godly conversation in truth and sincerity, not in show and profession only, but with your heart, and with all your heart, not dissembling, not dividing. He urges as motives, that they were bound in *gratitude* to serve God, considering what great things he had done for them. That they were bound in *interest* to serve him, considering what he would do against them, if they should still do wickedly. Thus, as a faithful watchman, he gave them warning, and so delivered his own soul. If we consider what great things the Lord hath done for us, especially in the great work of redemption, we can neither want motive, encouragement, nor assistance in serving him.

Large bodies of men are punishable as such, in this world only—in eternity there are no families, churches, nations. If, therefore, a country is to be destroyed, it is tried, condemned, and executed here. When we see an individual sinner prospering in the world, and not immediately punished, our faith is not staggered, for we know that his day is coming. But if a wicked people were allowed to escape, we should ask, Where is the God of judgment? for in that case they would not be punished now, and they cannot be punished hereafter. There is a tendency

in the very nature of sin to injure and ruin a country. God's dealings with guilty nations are confirmed by his word, and indeed by all history.—(42.)

17. Rain did not usually fall in Judea between March and October. *Jerom* states that he never saw rain in Palestine during the harvest months.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ver. 1—7. *The invasion of the philistines—Saul's difficulties.*

Saul reigned one year, and nothing happened that was considerable; it was a year of no action; but in his second year the events took place as recorded in this chapter. For above a year he gave the philistines time to prepare for war, and to weaken and to disarm the israelites. When men are lifted up in self-sufficiency, they are often left to unaccountable infatuation. The chief advantages of the enemies of the church are derived from the misconduct of its professed friends.

In the mean time Jonathan, probably by Saul's command, and, as it is imagined, contrary to treaty, destroyed a garrison of the philistines, and thus exasperated them before the israelites were prepared for warfare. Israel was had in abomination with the philistines; they not only resented the affront, but abhorred the perfidy. And when Saul at length sounded an alarm, the people, dissatisfied with his management, or terrified with the power of the enemy, either did not come to him, or speedily deserted him. In all this Saul was very impolitic; but the Lord intended to chastise the people for their sins, to expose their folly in expecting that a king could save them, and to prepare the way for the deliverance which he intended to effect for them.

5. It is not necessary to understand these to be all military chariots; some might be for carriage, or the word is sometimes put for the men that fought from the chariots.—*Poole*. There may be an error in transcribing the numbers, see the note on the variations in the historical books.

Ver. 8—14. *Saul sacrifices—He is reproved by Samuel.*

Samuel, when he anointed Saul, had ordered him to tarry for him seven days in Gilgal, promising that, at the end of those days, he would be sure to come to him, offer sacrifices for him, and direct him what he should do, ch. 10. 8. Perhaps that order was a general rule to be

observed; or, though not mentioned again was lately repeated with reference to this particular occasion. It is plain that Saul himself understood it as obliging him from God now to stay till Samuel came, else he would not have made so many excuses as he did for not staying. This order Saul broke; he stayed till the seventh day, yet had not patience to wait till the end of the seventh day. He presumed to offer sacrifice without Samuel, and it appears that he did it himself, though he was neither priest nor prophet. When Samuel came, Saul rather seemed to boast of what he had done, than to repent of it. He charged Samuel with breach of promise, although he did come according to his word, before the seven days were expired. Thus the scoffers of the latter days think the promise of Christ's coming is broken, because he does not come in their time, though it is certain he will come at the set time. When Saul was charged with disobedience, he justified himself in what he had done, and gave no sign of repentance for it. See what excuses he made, ver. 11, 12. He would have this act of disobedience pass for an instance of his prudence, and as a proof of his piety! He would be thought very careful not to engage the philistines till he had by prayer and sacrifice engaged God on his side. Thus he sought to cover his disobedience to God's command, with a pretence of concern for God's favour. Men destitute of inward piety, often lay great stress upon the outward performances of religion; they even fancy that they shall be accepted, because they force themselves to act contrary to their own natural inclinations.

God will have no worship of our devising; we may only do what he bids us, not that which he commands not. Never did any true piety arise out of man's brain; if it flow not from Heaven, it is odious to Heaven. God loves obedience better than sacrifice. Our faith is most commendable in the last act. It is no praise to hold out only till we are hard driven.—(34.)

Samuel found Saul standing by his burnt-offering, but, instead of an answer of peace, was sent with heavy tidings, and let him know that the sacrifice of the wicked is abomination to the Lord, much more, when he brings it, as Saul did, with a wicked mind. He charges him with being an enemy to himself;

Thou hast done foolishly. Those that disobey the commandments of God, do foolishly for themselves. Sin is folly, and sinners are the greatest fools. He reads his doom. But was not this hard, to pass so severe a sentence upon Saul and his house for a single error, and that seemed so small, and in excuse for which he had so much to say? No; the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and does no man any wrong; he will be justified when he speaks, and clear when he judges. By this, 1. He shows that there is no sin little. 2. He shows that disobedience to an express command, though in a small matter, is a great provocation, as in the case of our first parents. 3. He warns us to take heed of our spirits, for that which to men may seem but a small offence, yet to him that knows from what principle, and with what disposition of mind it is done, may appear a heinous crime. Also, we are taught how necessary it is that we wait on our God continually. Saul lost his kingdom for want of a few hours' patience. Our disposition to obey or to disobey God, will often be proved by our behaviour in things which appear small. And they who most neglect the duties of their own station in life, are most forward to censure others, and intrude into their work. By minding and keeping to our own business, we best approve ourselves to our Lord.

Men see nothing but Saul's outward act, which seems small; but God saw with how wicked a mind and heart he did this, with what rebellion against the light of his own conscience, with what gross infidelity and distrust of God's providence, with what contempt of God's authority and justice, and with how many other wicked principles and motions of his heart, unknown to men.—(54.)

Blessed Saviour, may we never, like Saul, bring our poor offerings, or fancied peace-offerings, without looking to thy precious, thy all-sufficient sacrifice. It is thou only, O Lord, that canst make, or hast made, our peace in the blood of the cross.—(37.)

14. This refers to David. It has been asked, Does this expression authorize his sins? By no means. It refers to his strict attention to the law and worship of God—that in all his public official conduct he acted according to the Divine mind, and fulfilled the law of his Maker.—*T. H. Horne*; see *Chandler*. Also see note at the end of 2 Sam.

Ver. 15—23. *The policy of the philistines.*

The philistines sent out three parties,

that took several ways, to plunder the country. By these the land of Israel was terrified and impoverished, and the philistines encouraged and enriched. This the sin of Israel brought upon them, Isa. 42. 24. The israelites that took the field with Saul had only slings and clubs, but not a sword or spear among them all, except what Saul and Jonathan themselves had. See here how politic the philistines were when they had power in their hands; they not only prevented the people of Israel from making weapons of war, but obliged them to depend upon their enemies, even for instruments of husbandry. How impolitic Saul was, who did not, in the beginning of his reign, set himself to redress this grievance! For Saul, who pretended to be a king, like the kings of the nations, to leave his soldiers without swords and spears, and take no care to provide them out of the spoils of the ammonites whom he conquered in the beginning of his reign, was negligence by no means to be excused. How slothful and mean-spirited the israelites were, that suffered the philistines thus to impose upon them, and had no thought nor spirit to help themselves!

Want of true sense always accompanies want of grace. Sins which appear to us very little, have dangerous consequences. How unstable is earthly grandeur! To-day a man is enthroned, to-morrow deposed! Miserable is a guilty defenceless nation; much more they who are destitute of the whole armour of God.—(10.)

15. The greek version is, "Then Samuel arose, and departed from Gilgal, and the remnant of the people went up after Saul, with the men of war, and when they were come from Gilgal unto Gibeah," &c.

20. To the stations of the philistines which they yet retained in several parts of Israel. In these they kept all the smiths.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ver. 1—15. *Jonathan smites the philistines.*

We must here notice the goodness of God in restraining the vast army of the philistines from falling upon that little handful of timorous, trembling people Saul had with him. An invisible power sets bounds to the malice of the church's enemies, and suffers them not to do that which we should think there is nothing to hinder them from.

Saul seems to have been quite at a loss, and unable to help himself. Now

he was fallen under God's displeasure, he every hour expected the philistines upon him, and thereby the accomplishment of Samuel's threatening. Those can never think themselves safe who see themselves out of God's protection. Now he sent for a priest and the ark. He hopes to compromise with God Almighty by a partial reformation, as many do whose hearts are unhumbled and unchanged. Many love to have such ministers as will be what they would have them to be, and prophesy smooth things to them. Their caressing some because they are priests, they hope, will atone for their enmity to the ministers that deal faithfully and plainly with them.

At this time Jonathan, the young prince, and his armour-bearer, with holy ardour and confidence in God, rushed into the camp of the philistines, and through their means that mighty army was put to flight and vanquished. Thus God graciously interposed for the deliverance of his people, while he showed the strongest disapprobation of Saul.—(60.)

Jonathan encouraged his armour-bearer to go with him in this daring enterprise. There is no restraint to the Lord, no limitation to the holy One of Israel, but it is all one to him to save by many or by few. This is a truth easily granted in general, that it is all alike to Omnipotence, what the instruments are by which he works; and yet it is not so easy to apply it to a particular case. When we are but few and feeble, then to believe that God not only can save us, but save by us, is an instance of faith, which, wherever it is, shall obtain a good report. Let this strengthen the weak, and hearten the heartless; let it be pleaded with God for the enforcing our petitions, and with ourselves for the silencing our fears. It is nothing with God to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power, 2 Chron. 14. 11. We may encourage ourselves with hope, that God will appear for us, though we have not ground on which to build an assurance. An active faith will venture far in God's cause upon an It may be.

We have reason to think that Jonathan felt a Divine impulse and impression, putting him upon this bold adventure. God will, some way or other, direct the steps of those that acknowledge him in all their ways, and seek unto him for direction, with full purpose of heart to follow his

conduct. Sometimes we find most comfort in that which is least our own doing, and into which we have been led by the unexpected, but well-observed turns of Divine Providence. Providence gave Jonathan the sign he expected. This greatly imboldened him. With it he encouraged his servant. He had spoken with uncertainty, ver. 6, It may be the Lord will work for us; but now with assurance, ver. 12, The Lord has delivered them, not into our hand, (he sought not his own glory,) but into the hand of Israel; he aimed at nothing but the advantage of the public. His faith being thus strengthened, no difficulty can stand before him; he had nothing to cover him, nor any but his own servant to second him, nor any human probability of anything but death before him.

See the wonderful success of this daring enterprise. The philistines fell before them unaccountably. There was trembling in the host. There was no visible cause for fear, yet the consternation was general; they all trembled, even the spoilers, those who had been most bold and forward, shared in the common fright, yet none of them could tell why. It is called a trembling of God, signifying, not only, as we render it, a very great trembling which they could not resist, nor reason themselves out of, but that it was supernatural, and came immediately from the hand of God. He that made the heart, knows how to make it tremble. To complete the confusion, even the earth quaked, and made them ready to fear that it would sink under them. Those who will not fear the eternal God, he can make afraid of a shadow. See Prov. 28. 1; Isa. 33. 14.

Faith is never so glorious as when it has most opposition, and will not see it. Reason looks ever to the means, faith to the end; and instead of consulting how to effect, resolves what shall be effected. The way to heaven is more steep, more painful. How perilous a passage, O Lord, hast thou appointed for thy labouring pilgrims! If difficulties discourage us, we shall but climb to fall. When lifting our feet to the last step, there are the philistines of death, of temptations, to grapple with, but give us faith and we shall overcome the spite of earth and hell!—(34.)

14. The original is obscure, but probably means a small space.—*Greenfield*.

Ver. 16—23. *The defeat of the philistines.*

The philistines were, by the power of

God, set against one another. The philistines were very secure, because all the swords and spears were in their hands; but God showed them the folly of that confidence, by making their own swords and spears the instruments of their destruction. See the like, Judg. 7. 22: 2 Chron. 20. 23. The israelites found none of their own forces absent, but only Jonathan and his servant, which, no doubt, greatly animated them, and assured them it could be no other than the Lord's doing.

Saul prepared to consult the Lord whether he ought to attack the philistines or not, but his impatient spirit could not wait for Ahiah's answer. He hastily prepared to march against them. And though the Lord, in saving Israel, was pleased to make use of these forces as well as the deserters and fugitives, yet Saul's hasty interposition and his subsequent rashness were rebuked, and the complete destruction of their enemies was prevented. The more evident it was that God did all, the more reason Saul had to inquire whether He would give him leave to do any thing. He was in such haste to fight a fallen enemy, that he would not stay to end his devotions, nor hear what answer God would give him. He that believeth, will not make such haste, nor reckon any business so urgent, as not to allow time to take God along with him.

Saul, and the little force he had, made a vigorous attack upon the enemy; and all the people were cried together, so the word is, ver. 20, for want of the silver trumpets, wherewith God appointed them to sound an alarm in the day of battle, Numb. 10. 9. They seem bold and brave, when the work is done to their hands! Our Lord Jesus has conquered our spiritual enemies, routed and dispersed them, so that we are cowards indeed, if we will not stand to our arms, when it is only to pursue the victory, and divide the spoil.

18. The greek version is, "Bring the ephod, for he at that time wore the ephod before Israel."

19. Desist from consulting the Divine Oracle.

Ver. 24—35. *Saul forbids the people to eat till the evening.*

Saul forbade the people, under the penalty of a curse, to taste any food that day. His making this severe order was very unwise; for if it gained time, it lost strength for the pursuit. To forbid them to feast had been commendable, but to forbid them to taste, though hungry, was barbarous. It was impious to enforce

the prohibition with a curse and an oath. Had he no penalty less than an anathema? Death for such a crime had been too much, but especially death with a curse. Though superiors may chide and correct, they may not curse their inferiors; our rule is, Bless, and curse not.

Canaan flowed with honey, and here is an instance of it. Those are worthy the name of israelites, who can deny their own appetites, even when most craving, and the delights of sense most tempting, for fear of guilt and a curse, and the table becoming a snare. Let us never feed ourselves, much less feast ourselves, without fear. Jonathan fell under the curse through ignorance. Good sons have been entangled and distressed by the rashness of inconsiderate fathers. The soldiers were faint, and grew feeble, in the pursuit of the philistines. Jonathan foresaw their spirits would flag, and their strength would fail, for want of sustenance. Such is the nature of our bodies, that daily work cannot be done without daily bread, which therefore our Father in heaven graciously gives. The worst effect was, that, at evening, when the restraint was taken off, they were so greedy and eager, that they ate the flesh with the blood, expressly contrary to the law of God. They would not stay to have their meat either duly killed, or duly dressed, but fell greedily upon it, before it was half dressed. Saul, being informed of it, reproved them for the sin, but did not, as he should have done, reflect upon himself as having been accessory to it, and as having made the Lord's people to transgress.

On this occasion Saul built an altar, that he might offer sacrifice, either by way of acknowledgment of the victory they had obtained, or by way of atonement for the sin they had been guilty of. The same was the first altar that he built. Saul was turning aside from God, and now he begins to build altars, being most zealous, as many are, for the form of godliness then when he was denying the power of it. See Hos. 8. 14. Israel has forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples. Some read it, He began to build that altar; he laid the first stone, but was so hasty to pursue his victory, that he could not stay to finish it.

Ver. 36—46. *Jonathan pointed out by lot.*

Saul proposed to pursue the philistines all night, and not leave a man of them. It is common for rash and foolish men to

consider nobody but themselves, and, so they may but have their humour, not to care what hardships they put upon those under them. But when the priest proposed to go on with the devotions that were broken off abruptly, Saul could not refuse. And God, by giving an intimation of his displeasure, put Saul upon searching. When God denies our prayers, it concerns us to inquire what the sin is that has provoked him to do so. "Let us see where the sin is," for God's ear is not heavy that it cannot hear; it is sin that separates between us and him. If God turns away our prayer, we have reason to suspect it is for some iniquity regarded in our hearts, which we are concerned to find out, that we may put it away, mortify it, and put it to death. We should always first suspect and examine ourselves; but an unhumbled heart suspects every other person, and looks every where but at home for the sinful cause of calamity.

Jonathan was discovered by lot to be the offender. Saul prayed that God would give a perfect lot, that is, make a full discovery of this matter, or, as it is in the margin, that he would show the innocent. Jonathan denies not the truth, nor goes about to conceal it, only he thinks it hard that he must die for it. Saul is not softened by his filial submission, nor the hardness of his case, but as one who affected to be thought firm to his word, and much more to his oath, even then, when it bound him hardest, with another imprecation he gives judgment upon Jonathan. The habit of swearing will be sure to involve a man in the guilt of perjury. Those who are most indulgent to their own sins are most severe upon others; those who most disregard God's authority, are most impatient when their own commands are slighted. And even justice is debased, when it is administered with wrath and bitterness. This curse did return upon his own head. Jonathan escaped, but God did so to Saul, and more also. Let none on any occasion dare to use such imprecations, lest God make their own tongues to fall upon them, Psa. 64. 8. He that rolleth this stone, it will return upon him. By these vexatious accidents, God likewise corrected him for his presumption, in offering sacrifice without Samuel. An expedition so ill begun, could not end without some rebukes. The people rescued Jonathan out of his father's hands. It is good to see israelites

zealous to protect those whom God has made instruments of public good.

What do we observe in the whole of Saul's behaviour on this occasion, but an impetuous, proud, malignant, impious disposition? And do we not in every instance perceive that man, left to himself, betrays the depravity of his nature, and is enslaved to the basest tempers.—(60.)

Ver. 47—52. *Saul's family.*

Here is a general account of Saul's court and camp. It is supposed that he acted defensively against those that used to invade the borders of Israel; and whithersoever he turned himself, as there was occasion, he vexed them, by checking and disappointing them. But the enemies he struggled most with, were the philistines—with them he had sore war all his days. He had little reason to be proud of his royal dignity, nor had any of his neighbours cause to envy him, for he had little enjoyment of himself after he took the kingdom. In temporal prosperity men forget their sins, and the threatened wrath of God; thus they blaze for a moment, like a meteor, and then are put out in utter darkness. Lord, let us rather be chastened here, than prosper and be condemned with the world!

CHAPTER XV.

Ver. 1—9. *Saul sent to destroy Amalek—He spares the best of the spoil.*

After some time Samuel was sent to Saul, with an express command utterly to destroy the amalekites. The prophet reminded him that he had been sent by the Lord to anoint him king, and that he now came by the same authority. He intimated plainly that if Saul did not hearken to the voice of the words of the Lord, he should be authorized to denounce the sentence of rejection, and he gave him full and explicit instructions. God's favours to us lay strong obligations upon us, to be obedient to him. This we must render, Psa. 116. 12. The sentence of condemnation against the amalekites had gone forth long before, Exod. 17. 14; Deut. 25. 19, but they had been spared till they had filled up the measure of their iniquities. We are sure that the righteous Lord does no injustice to any.

Saul gave friendly advice to the kenites, to separate from the amalekites among whom they dwelt. The kenites were of the family of Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses. A good man leaves the Divine

blessing for an inheritance to his children's children; those that come after us may reap the benefit of our good works when we are in our graves. God is not unrighteous to forget the kindnesses shown to his people; but they shall be remembered another day, at furthest in the great day. God's remembering the kindness of the ancestors of the kenites, in favour to them, at the time he was punishing the injuries done to the ancestors of the amalekites, tended to clear the righteousness of God in that dispensation. It is dangerous to be found in the company of God's enemies, and it is our duty and interest to come out from among them, lest we share in their sins and plagues, Rev. 18. 4.

The Lord had devoted the whole multitude and all their substance to utter destruction. But though Saul did not spare the women and children, yet to grace his victory, and from covetousness, he spared the king, Agag, and the best of the flocks and herds, destroying only the refuse. As the commandment had been express, and a test of his obedience, his conduct evidently was the effect of a proud, rebellious spirit. He destroyed only the refuse, that was good for little. Many of the people, we may suppose, made their escape, and took their effects into other countries, and we read of amalekites after this. That which was now destroyed, was, in effect, sacrificed to the justice of God, as the God to whom vengeance belongeth.

Ver. 10—23. *Saul excuses and commends himself—Samuel denounces God's rejection of him.*

We are here told what passed between God and Samuel, in secret, upon this occasion. Repentance in God is not, as it is in us, a change of his mind, but a change of his method or dispensation. He does not alter his will, but he wills an alteration. The change was in Saul, He is turned back from following me; this construction God put upon the partiality of his obedience, and the prevalence of his covetousness. Hereby he made God his enemy. God repented that he had given Saul the kingdom, and the honour and power that belonged to it; but he never repented that he had given any man wisdom and grace, and his fear and love; those gifts and callings of God are without repentance. It grieved Samuel that Saul had forfeited God's favour; and he spent a whole night interceding for him. He did not thus deprecate his own

exclusion from the government; nor was he secretly pleased, as many would have been, that Saul, who succeeded him, was so soon laid aside, but, on the contrary, prayed earnestly for his establishment. The rejection of sinners is the grief of believers: God delights not in their death, nor should we.

Saul makes his boast to Samuel of his obedience. Thus sinners think, by justifying themselves, to escape being judged of the Lord. Those who boast most of their religion, may justly be suspected of partiality and hypocrisy in it. Samuel convicts him by a plain demonstration of his disobedience. The noise the cattle made, like the rust of the silver, Jam. 5. 3, would witness against him. Many boast of obedience to the command of God; but what mean then their indulgence of the flesh, their love of the world, their passion and uncharitableness, and their neglect of holy duties, which witness against them?

Saul insists upon his own justification against this charge. But if it had been true, it had been frivolous, for God appointed these cattle to be sacrificed to him in the field, and he will be served in his own way, and according to the rule he himself has prescribed. Nor will a good intention justify a wrong action. Samuel proceeds, in God's name, to give judgment against Saul. He states that what he was about to say, was what the Lord had said to him. Those who complain that their ministers are too harsh, should remember that while they keep to the word of God, they are but messengers, and must say as they are bidden. See of what evil covetousness is the root; and see what is the sinfulness of sin, and that in it which above any thing else makes it evil in the sight of the Lord—it is disobedience; Thou didst not obey the voice of the Lord.

Saul repeats his vindication of himself, as that by which, in defiance of conviction, he resolved to abide. Carnal, deceitful hearts think to excuse themselves from God's commandments with their own equivalents. Observe how hard it is to convince the children of disobedience. Samuel gives a full answer to Saul's apology. He appeals to his own conscience, nothing is so pleasing to God as obedience. See at what we should aim and endeavour in all the exercises of religion, even acceptance with God, that he may

delight in what we do. Here we are plainly told, that humble, sincere, and conscientious obedience to the will of God, is more pleasing and acceptable to him than all burnt-offering and sacrifices. A careful conformity to moral precepts recommends us to God, more than all ceremonial observances, Mic. 6. 6—8; Hos. 6. 6. God is more glorified, and self more denied, by obedience than by sacrifice. It is much easier to bring a bullock or lamb to be burnt upon the altar, than to bring every high thought into obedience to God, and the will subject to his will. Obedience is the glory of angels, Psa. 103. 20, and it will be ours. Nothing is so provoking to God as disobedience, setting up our wills in competition with his. Disobedience made us all sinners, Rom. 5. 19, and this is the malignity of sin, that it is the transgression of the law, and consequently enmity to God, Rom. 8. 7.

Lastly. Samuel reads the doom of Saul; "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord," hast despised it, so the chaldee; hast made nothing of it, so the greek; hast cast off the government of it; therefore he has rejected thee, cast thee off from being king. Those are unfit and unworthy to rule over men, who are not willing God should rule over them.

12. By a place is meant some trophy or memorial of his victory.

See the note respecting the destruction of the canaanites at the end of Joshua; most of those remarks are applicable to the amalekites.

Ver. 24—31. *Saul's imperfect humiliation.*

We observe several bad signs of the hypocrisy of Saul's repentance. 1. He made application to Samuel only, and seemed most solicitous to stand right in his opinion, and to gain his favour. Those wretchedly deceive themselves, who think it enough to make their peace with the church and their ministers, by the show and plausible profession of repentance, without taking care to make their peace with God by the sincerity of it. 2. He excused his fault even when confessing it; that is never the fashion of a true penitent. It is common for sinners, in excusing faults, to plead the thoughts and workings of their own minds; those are things which, how groundless soever, no man can disprove; but they forget that God searches the heart. 3. All his care was to save his credit, and preserve his interest in the people. Very importunate Saul was in this matter; he laid hold on the skirt of Samuel's mantle to detain

him. It is common for those who are convicted of sin, to show themselves very solicitous to be honoured before the people: whereas it is the honour of a penitent to take shame to himself.

Samuel repeated the sentence passed upon him, so far was he from giving him any hopes of the repeal of it. He illustrated the sentence by a sign, which Saul himself gave occasion for. By rending Samuel's mantle, in his effort to detain him, Saul afforded a significant token of the kingdom being rent from him, as Samuel by Divine inspiration interpreted it. He ratified the sentence by a solemn declaration of its being irreversible. The Strength of Israel will not lie; The Eternity or victory of Israel, so some read it; The Holy One, so the arabic; The most noble One, so the syriac. Men are fickle and alter their minds, feeble and cannot effect their purposes; something happens they could not foresee, by which their measures are broken; but with God it is not so.

Ver. 32—35. *Agag put to death—Samuel and Saul part.*

Samuel destroyed king Agag, doubtless by such a special direction from Heaven as none now can pretend to, and as a sacrifice to God's injured justice. Neither dignity, delicacy, vain-confidence, nor even trembling, give the sinner any security. Many think the bitterness of death is past when it is not so; they put that evil day far from them, which is very near. True believers may, through grace, say this upon good grounds; though death be not past, the bitterness of it is; O death, where is thy sting? Samuel calls Agag to account for his own sins. He trod in the steps of his ancestors' cruelty, justly therefore is all the righteous blood shed by Amalek required. Samuel takes leave of Saul, and never came any more to see him. He mourned for the bad state of the country, to which Saul now would prove a curse and a plague. He mourned for his everlasting state, having no hopes of bringing him to repentance. Saul seems unconcerned at the token of God's displeasure which he lay under, yet Samuel mourns day and night for him. Jerusalem was secure while Christ wept over it.

Many whose hearts are upright with God are so oppressed with a sense of their iniquities, especially of those committed after professions of piety, that they fear

the history of Saul is a picture of themselves. But to them that *hate* every evil way, consolation can be administered. The distress you feel is a proof you are not rejected of God; for to him you must ascribe your abhorrence of sin, and your earnest desire to be renewed in holiness. Saul's case is not yours. You have dispositions of mind which he had not. O give thanks, and hold fast that which you have received.—Do we *desire* to do the whole will of God? O turn unto him, not in form and appearance only, but with unfeigned sincerity.—(60.)

33. Agag probably was put to death by the public executioner, and the sacred penman is careful to inform us that it was as a notorious public murderer he was put to death. With Saul, the instrument commissioned of God to destroy "the sinners, the amalekites," Samuel expostulates respecting his disobedience to the Divine command. To Agag he holds very different language, he speaks of his demerits and deserts. That God interferes not with the murderous courses of every tyrant, is far from being a reason that he should not interfere with those of any.—*Carpenter*.

CHAPTER XVI.

Ver. 1—5. *Samuel sent to Bethlehem to Jesse.*

God reproved Samuel for continuing so long to mourn for the rejection of Saul. He sends him to Bethlehem, to anoint one of the sons of Jesse. It appears that Saul was grown very wicked and outrageous since his rejection. Of what impiety would he not be guilty, who durst think to kill Samuel? Samuel's faith was not so strong as one would have expected, else he had not thus feared the rage of Saul. But this may be understood as Samuel's desire of direction from Heaven how to manage this matter, so as not to expose himself, or any other, more than needed. Those who go about God's work, in God's way, shall be directed step by step, wherever they are at a loss.

The elders of Bethlehem trembled at Samuel's coming. It becomes us to stand in awe of God's messengers, and to tremble at his word; or, they feared it might be an occasion of Saul's displeasure against them. His answer was, I come peaceably, for I come to sacrifice. When our Lord Jesus came into the world, though men had reason to tremble, fearing that his errand was to condemn the world, yet he gave full assurance that he came peaceably, for he came to sacrifice, and he brought his offering with him; "A body hast thou

prepared me." Let us sanctify ourselves, that we may have an interest in His sacrifice. Samuel said, I come peaceably, for I come to sacrifice. Those that come to sacrifice, should come peaceably; religious exercises must not be performed tumultuously. He spoke to all the elders to sanctify themselves; but he sanctified Jesse and his sons by praying with them, and instructing them. It appears, ch. 20. 29, where we read of the sacrifices that family had, that it was a devout, religious family. When signal blessings are coming into a family, they ought to sanctify themselves.

Ver. 6—13. *Human judgment reproved—David is anointed.*

The elder sons were passed by. Eliab the eldest, was presented first, and Samuel thought he must be the man. The prophets, when they spake not under the Divine direction, were as liable to mistake as other men. But God rectified the prophet's mistake; Look not on his countenance. It was strange that Samuel, who had been so disappointed in Saul, whose countenance and stature recommended him, should be forward to judge of another man by that rule. Men judge by the sight of the eyes, but God does not, Isa. 11. 3, The Lord looks on the heart, that is, he knows it. We can tell how men *look*, but God can tell what they *are*. He judges of men by the heart. Let us reckon that true beauty which is within, and judge of men, as far as we are capable, by their minds, not by their mien. Had it been left to Samuel or Jesse to make the choice, one of the elder sons had certainly been chosen; but God will magnify his sovereignty, in passing by some who are most promising, as well as in fixing on others that are less so. Yet it is difficult for man to lay aside partiality for those who have outward accomplishments. Thus we often form a mistaken judgment of characters; but the Lord values not these things, only the holy faith, fear, and love which are planted in the heart, beyond human discernment. And he does not favour our children according to our fond partialities, but often most honours and blesses those who have been least regarded.

David at length was pitched upon. He was the youngest of the sons of Jesse; his name signifies Beloved, for he was a type of the beloved Son. It should seem, David was least set by of all the sons of

Jesse. He was in the fields, keeping the sheep, and was left there, though there was a sacrifice and a feast at his father's house. God's methods of educating men for important stations of usefulness differ much from those which human wisdom hath devised. David was keeping sheep, though it was a time of sacrifice; there is mercy that takes place of sacrifice. The Lord told Samuel (as ch. 9. 15) that this was he whom he must anoint, ver. 12. Samuel objects not to the meanness of his education, his youth, or the little respect he had in his own family; but anointed him in obedience to the Divine command, signifying thereby, a Divine designation to the government, after the death of Saul, of which hereby he gave him a full assurance. Also a Divine communication of gifts and graces, to fit him for the government, and to make him a type of the Messiah, the anointed One, who received the Spirit, not by measure, but without measure. Some read the hebrew, He anointed him from the midst of his brethren, that is, he singled him out from the rest, and privately anointed him, with a charge not to let his own brethren know it, as by ch. 17. 28. it seems Eliab did not.

It is computed that David was now about twenty years old; if so, his troubles by Saul lasted ten years, for he was thirty years old when Saul died. The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. The anointing him was not an empty ceremony, but a Divine power went along with that instituted sign; he found himself inwardly advanced in wisdom, and courage, and concern for the public, with all the qualifications of a prince, though not at all advanced in his outward circumstances. This would abundantly satisfy him that his election was of God. The best evidence of our being predestinated to the kingdom of glory, is our being sealed with the Spirit of promise, and our experience of a work of grace in our own hearts. Some think that David's courage, by which he slew the lion and the bear, and his extraordinary skill in music, were effects and evidences of the Spirit's coming upon him. It made him the sweet psalmist of Israel, 2 Sam. 23. 1. Samuel, having done this, went to Ramah in safety. He retired to die in peace, since his eyes had seen the salvation, even the sceptre brought into the tribe of Judah.

Ver. 14—23. *Saul troubled with an evil spirit, is quieted by David.*

Saul is made a terror to himself; The Spirit of the Lord departed from him. He, having forsaken God and his duty, God, in a way of righteous judgment, withdrew those assistances by which he was directed, animated, and encouraged in his government and wars. He lost all his good qualities. This was the effect of his rejecting God, and an evidence of his being rejected by him. The consequence was, that an evil spirit from God troubled him. If God and his grace do not rule us, sin and Satan will have possession of us. The devil, by the Divine permission, troubled and terrified Saul, by means of the corrupt humours of his body, and passions of his mind. He grew fretful, peevish, and discontented, and at times quite a madman. This made him unfit for business, precipitate in his counsels, the contempt of his enemies, a burden to all about him.

Saul is distempered; his servants have the honesty and courage to tell him what his distemper was. They advise music for his relief. Better friends had they been to him, if they had advised him, since the evil spirit was from the Lord, to give all diligence to make his peace with God by true repentance, to send for Samuel to pray with him, and to intercede with God for him; then he might not only have had some present relief, but the good Spirit would have returned to him. Many whose consciences are convinced and startled, are for ever ruined by methods which drown all care of the soul in the delights of sense.

The hand of the Lord is manifest in thus bringing David to court. His instrumental music with his harp is the only kind mentioned; but it should seem by the account Josephus gives of it, that he sung hymns, songs of praise, to his harp. Music has a natural tendency to compose and exhilarate the mind, when disturbed and saddened. On some it has more influence and effect than on others, and, probably, Saul was one of those. David's music was extraordinary. God made his performance in music successful in this case, as one that had the Lord with him. Saul found, even after he had conceived an enmity to David, that no one else could do him the same service, ch. 19. 9. It is a pity that music, which may be serviceable to the good temper of

the mind, should ever be abused by any to the support of vanity and luxury, and made an occasion of drawing the heart away from God and serious things. If that be to any the effect of it, it drives away the good Spirit, not the evil spirit. Music, diversions, company, or business have *for a time* frequently been employed to quiet the wounded conscience; but nothing can effect a real cure but the blood of Christ, applied in faith, and the sanctifying Spirit sealing the pardon, by his holy comforts. All other expedients to dispel religious melancholy are sure methods to increase distress, either in this world or the next.

Every endowment which admits of useful exercise, in connexion with godliness, is to be ascribed to the energy of the Divine Spirit; opportunities will be afforded for its being displayed, and by Divine grace they will be suitably improved. And good conduct in inferior stations is the best introduction to higher advancement. Even Jesus was obedient unto death, ere he was advanced to his glorious throne; and he trains up his people, by obedience, in the midst of temptation and trouble, for their future inheritance in the region of holiness and happiness.

CHAPTER XVII.

Ver. 1—11. *Goliath's challenge.*

When those to whom it especially belongs to defend the cause of God and his church, are destitute of his Spirit, it is no wonder if open enemies are encouraged, and friends dispirited. As the fear of God declines, the fear of man will gather strength. The philistines defied Israel with their champion Goliath, hoping by him to recover their reputation and dominion. Concerning this champion, observe his prodigious size, and his armour; art, as well as nature, made him terrible. Also his challenge; he bade defiance to the armies of Israel. But what are human wisdom, strength, or courage, unless preserved by Him that gave them, or when employed in rebellion against Him!

That Saul and all Israel were dismayed may seem strange, considering the glorious promises and their late experience of Divine assistance. But the truth is, all men so entirely depend upon God in all things, that when he withdraws his help, the most valiant and resolute

persons cannot find their hearts or hands, as daily experience shows.—(54.)

3. The Terebinthine vale or valley of Elah, is thus described by a modern traveller: "Its present appearance answers exactly to the description given in scripture. The two hills on which the armies stood confine it on the right and left. The brook whence David chose him five smooth stones (which has been noticed by many a thirsty pilgrim travelling from Jaffa to Jerusalem) still flows through the vale. The ruins of goodly edifices attest the religious veneration entertained in latter periods for this hallowed spot; but even these are now scarcely discernible."

4. The height of Goliath has been variously computed, from nine feet six inches to eleven feet ten inches. His armour is calculated to have weighed two hundred and seventy pounds.

Ver. 12—30. *David comes to the camp of Israel.*

The two armies lay encamped forty days, facing one another, but neither forward to engage. All this while, twice a day, morning and evening, did the insulting champion appear in the field, and repeat his challenge.

David had returned from court to the obscurity of his father's house, and to the care, and toil, and, as it proved, ver. 34, the peril, of keeping his father's sheep. Now he had opportunity for meditation and prayer, and other acts of devotion, which fitted him for what he was destined to. He did not ask leave to visit his brethren in the camp; but his father sent him on a homely errand, which any servant might have done. David must still be the drudge of the family, though he was to be the greatest ornament of it. His prudence and care made him be up early, and yet not to leave his sheep without a keeper, he was faithful in a few things, therefore the more fit to be made ruler over many things; and so well had he learnt to obey, before he aspired to command. God's providence brought him to the camp when both armies had set the battle in array. Jesse little thought of sending his son to the army at that critical juncture; but the wise God orders the time and all the circumstances of actions and affairs, so as to serve his designs of securing the interests of Israel, and advancing the man after his own heart.

Saul, in his great distress, does not encourage himself in God, nor seek his counsel or favour by prayers and sacrifices, but expects relief from men only, ver. 25. This was one effect and sign of the departure of God's Spirit from him.—(54.)

Two considerations fired David with

holy indignation. 1. That the challenger was one that was uncircumcised, a stranger to God, and out of covenant with him. 2. That the challenged were the armies of the living God, devoted to him, employed by him and for him, so that the affronts to them, reflected upon the living God himself, and *that* he cannot bear.

Eliab intended, in what he said, not only to grieve and discourage David himself, but to represent him as an idle, proud lad, not fit to be taken notice of. He gives the standers-by to understand that his business was only to keep sheep, and falsely insinuates that he was a careless, unfaithful shepherd. Though David came to the camp in obedience to his father, and kindness to his brethren, and Eliab knew it, yet this is turned to his reproach. In times of general formality and lukewarmness, every degree of zeal which implies readiness to go further, or to venture more in the cause of God than others, will be censured as pride and ambition, and by none more than by near relations, and negligent superiors. Conscious integrity and confidence in God, united with meekness, wisdom, and perseverance, will carry a man through such opposition, and raise him above it. David could appeal to God concerning his humility and sincerity, Psa. 17. 3; 131. 1; and at this time gave proofs of both, and yet could not escape this hard character from his own brother. See the folly, absurdity, and wickedness of a proud and envious passion; how groundless its jealousies, how unjust its censures, how unfair its representations, how bitter its invectives, how evil its language. May God, by his grace, keep us from such a spirit!

It was a trial of David's meekness, patience, and constancy. He bore the provocation with admirable temper. He had right and reason on his side, but did not render railing for railing; with a soft answer he turned away his brother's wrath. This conquest of his own passion was, in some respects, even more honourable than that of Goliath. He would not be driven from engaging the philistine by the ill-will of his brother. Those who undertake great and public services, must not think it strange if they are discountenanced and opposed by those from whom they had reason to expect support and assistance; but must humbly go on with their work, in the face not only of enemies' threats, but of friends' slights and suspicions.

Ver. 31—39. *David undertakes to encounter Goliath.*

David is at length presented to Saul for his champion, and undertakes to fight the philistine. A little shepherd, come but the same morning from keeping sheep, had more courage than all the mighty men of Israel, and encouraged them! Thus God often sends good words to his Israel, and does great things for them, by the weak and foolish things of the world. He met the objection of Saul—Thou art but a youth, and how canst thou expect but that he will be too hard for thee? As he had answered his brother's passion with meekness, so David answered Saul's fear with faith, and gives a reason of the hope which was in him, that he should conquer the philistine. He had, by Divine assistance, spirit enough to encounter, and strength enough to subdue a lion once, and another time a bear, that robbed him of his lambs; to these he compares this uncircumcised philistine, looks upon him to be a ravenous beast as them, and doubts not but to deal as easily with him; and hereby gives Saul to understand, that he was not inexperienced in hazardous combats.

When David kept sheep, he approved himself very careful and tender of his flock, though it was not his own, but his father's. When he saw a lamb in distress he ventured his life to rescue it. This temper made him fit to be a king, to whom the lives of the subjects should be dear, and their blood precious, *Psa.* 72. 14; and a type of Christ, the good Shepherd, who gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom, *Isa.* 40. 11; who not only ventured, but laid down his life for the sheep. Thus, too, was David an example to ministers, with the utmost care and diligence to watch for souls, that they be not a prey to the roaring lion.

He owns it was the Lord that delivered him from the lion and the bear; to Him he gives the praise of that great achievement, and from thence infers, He will deliver me out of the hand of this philistine. Our experience ought to be improved by us, as encouragements to trust in God, and venture in the way of duty. He that has delivered, does and will continue to do so. By the care which Providence takes of inferior creatures, and the protection they are under, we may be encouraged to depend upon that spe-

cial Providence which surrounds the Israel of God. He who sets bounds to the waves of the sea, and the rage of wild beasts, can and will restrain the wrath of wicked men. St. Paul seems to allude to this, *2 Tim.* 4. 17, 18. And any believer in the Saviour may predict that the triumphing of the opposers of the truth shall be short. If fairly called to it, we need not fear to go forth against the most formidable, merely with the sling and the stone, the plain testimonies of scripture, unadorned by human eloquence or learning, trusting in Him who has all power in heaven and earth, engaged in support of his cause and truth.

Thus David gained permission to fight the philistine. Not being accustomed to such armour as Saul put upon him, he was not satisfied to go in that manner; this was from the Lord, that it might more evidently appear that he fought and conquered in faith, and that the victory was from Him who works by the feeblest and most despised means and instruments.

It is not to be inquired how excellent any thing is, but how proper. Let Saul's coat be ever so rich, and his armour ever so strong, what is David the better if they fit him not?—(34.)

Rules and methods, which are useful and natural to one man, are encumbrances to another. We all do best when we cultivate our own peculiar talent, taking hints from every body, and not attempting exact conformity to any one. But faith, prayer, truth, and righteousness—the whole armour of God, and the mind that was in Christ, are equally needful for all the servants of the Lord, whatever be their work or method of doing it.

38. With armour taken out of Saul's armoury. Saul's own armour would hardly have suited, on account of his extraordinary stature; nor is it likely he would disarm himself when going forth to the battle, *ver.* 20, 21. Or with his vestments or garments. So the word usually and properly signifies, so the armour is spoken of in the following words as different from these.—*Poole.*

Ver. 40—47. *David goes forth to meet Goliath.*

Goliath looketh upon his adversary with scorn, and presumed upon his success with confidence. Thus the security and presumption of fools destroy them. David's speech savours nothing of ostentation, God is all in all in it, *ver.* 45—47. He derives his authority from God. He depends wholly for success upon God. He devotes the praise and glory of all to

God. Nothing can exceed the humility, faith, and piety which appear in this beautiful speech. David expressed his assured expectation of success; he gloried in his mean appearance and arms, that the victory might be the more unquestionably ascribed to the Lord. He even expressed a hope that it might convince the philistines that the God of Israel was the only true God, predicting that the power and glory of Jehovah would be made known to all the earth.

The number of David's weapons showed confidence, as well as the quality. If he will put life and victory upon the stones of the brook, why did he not fill his scrip full of them? He hath but five stones cast either to death or victory. The fewer helps, the stronger faith!—(34.)

Ver. 48—58. *David kills Goliath.*

The philistine advanced with a great deal of state. This is intimated in the manner of expression. David advanced with activity and cheerfulness. We may imagine with what compassion the israelites saw such a pleasing youth throwing himself into the mouth of destruction; but he knew whom he had believed, and for whom he acted. Goliath was in no haste, because in no fear, but confident that he should at one stroke cleave his adversary's head; but while he was preparing to do this, David slang a stone, which hit him in the forehead. God's providence directed the stone, and brought it with such force, that it sunk into his head. See how frail and uncertain life is, even when it thinks itself best fortified; and how quickly, how easily, and with how small a matter the passage may be opened for life to go out, and death to enter. Let not the strong man glory in his strength, nor the armed man in his armour. God resists the proud, and pours contempt upon those who defy him and his people. None ever hardened his heart against God, and prospered. To complete the execution, David drew Goliath's own sword, and with it cut off his head. What need had David to take a sword of his own? his enemy's sword shall serve his purpose, when he has occasion for one. God is greatly glorified when his proud enemies are cut off with their own sword. David's victory over Goliath was typical of the triumphs of the Son of David over Satan and all the powers of darkness, whom he spoiled, and made a show of them openly, Col. 2.

15, and we through him are more than conquerors.

The philistines' army relied upon the strength of their champion, and when they saw him slain, they took to flight, being wholly dispirited. They fled, and this put life into the israelites; they shouted and pursued them, ver. 52, and enriched themselves with the spoil.

To what shall we ascribe the bravery and success of David? Not to the exertion of a mere natural temper, but to the influence of those Divine principles, faith and zeal. The history is recorded that all may be encouraged to exert themselves for the honour of God, and the support of his cause, whatever dangers may threaten, with a bold and unshaken reliance on the help of God. There is *one* conflict in which all the followers of the Lamb are, and must be engaged—*one* enemy more formidable than Goliath still challenges the armies of Israel. But "resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Only go forth to battle with the faith of David, and the powers of darkness shall not stand against you. But alas! how often is the christian foiled through an evil heart of unbelief!—(60.)

51. The stone might pierce the helmet, or pass through the hole left for sight, or Goliath might have lifted up the part of his helmet that covered his forehead, in contempt of David. The stone stunned the giant, and he fell to the earth. Some life remained, which was taken away by the sword. As David was able to manage the giant's sword here, and ch. 21. 9, we may conclude that he was a man of some bulk and strength. Psalm 9. is supposed to refer to the victory over Goliath.

55. David might be unknown to Saul, because he was not constantly with him, and only upon extraordinary occasions, and fits of melancholy. The multitude of persons who resorted to Saul as the king, might cause him to forget some, and his distemper might make him forgetful. David also might be changed both in countenance and dress since he was at court. Abner's employment being in the camp, he might not have seen him at court: see *Poole*. Or rather, as *Lightfoot* concludes, Saul and Abner were not ignorant who David was: but they wonder what kind of a man it was that had such sons as Jesse had in the army, and that his question was not so much of David's person as of his parentage. *Chandler* considers it certain that Saul knew David's name and person. He does not ask nor is he told his name. *Houbigant* observes, He does not inquire who David is, but whose son he is. This was important to him to know, as David was to be his son-in-law. *Horsley* and others consider that David was not required to play the harp before Saul till after his encounter with Goliath, and insert ch. 16. 14—23, between ver. 9. and 10. of ch. 18: see *Townsend*. This is supported with several weighty arguments. But though there is some apparent disorder in the present arrangement of ch. 16. 17. 18. it is not of any importance, even to the historical facts.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Ver. 1—5. *Jonathan's friendship for David.*

The amiable and estimable qualities of David attracted the cordial esteem and affection of Jonathan. They were united in the strictest friendship, notwithstanding the envy and malice of Saul, and though Jonathan knew that David was anointed to be king, to his own exclusion. Their friendship was the effect of Divine grace, which produces in true believers one heart and one soul, forms them of the same judgment and disposition, and causes them to love each other. True religion will make us delight in the society of those whom the Lord loves and honours, who bear his image, and are zealous for his glory, without respect to station, or selfish considerations. This union of souls results from partaking in the Spirit of Christ. Where God unites hearts, carnal matters are too weak to separate them, since to break off affection requires something stronger than that which conjoins it.

Jonathan testified his love to David by a present of garments he had worn. David is seen in Jonathan's clothes, all may take notice he is Jonathan's second self. Our Lord Jesus thus showed his love to us; he stripped himself to clothe us, emptied himself to enrich us; nay, he did more than Jonathan, he clothed himself with our rags. The mutual affection of David and Jonathan was sincere; he that bears an honest mind startles not at assurances. True love desires to be constant. Those who love Christ as their own souls, will be willing to join themselves to him in an everlasting covenant. David was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants, ver. 5. It was certainly a great instance of the power of God's grace in David, that he was able to bear all this respect and honour flowing in upon him of a sudden, without being lifted up above measure. It is harder to know how to abound than how to be abased.

4. The presenting an article of dress is considered in the east as ratifying a promise or agreement. The gift of the girdle used by the military, in particular, was a valuable present.

Ver. 6—11. *Saul seeks to kill David.*

David's troubles not only immediately follow his triumphs, but take rise from them; such is the vanity of that which

seems greatest in this world. Saul perceived that David increased, while he decreased in popularity, and began to look upon him with a jealous and malignant eye. It is a sign that the Spirit of God is departed from men, if they are peevish in resenting affronts, envious and suspicious of all about them, and ill-natured in their conduct; for the wisdom from above makes us otherwise. The very next day, after Saul conceived malice against David, the evil spirit that had formerly haunted him, seized him again. Those who indulge in envy and uncharitableness, give place to the devil, and prepare for the re-entry of the unclean spirit, with seven others more wicked. Where envy is, there is confusion. Saul pretended a religious ecstasy, to decoy David into a snare; but really it was a hellish fury that actuated him. He endeavoured to slay David; not in sudden passion, but deliberately. If a grateful sense of the great service David had done to the public could not assuage Saul's fury, yet one would think he should have allowed himself to consider the kindness he was now doing to himself, relieving him, so as no one else could, against the worst of troubles. Compare David, with his harp in his hand, aiming to serve Saul, and Saul, with his javelin in his hand, aiming to slay David; and observe the sweetness and usefulness of God's persecuted people, and the brutishness and barbarity of their persecutors! The bloodthirsty hate the upright, but the just seek his soul, Prov. 29. 10. David happily avoided the blow: though he had both strength and courage enough to resist and revenge the injury, yet he did no more than secure himself, by getting out of the way. But his safety must be ascribed to God's providence.

10. The word should rather be rendered muttered and grumbled, a common effect of a melancholy, disordered mind.—*Chandler.*

Ver. 12—30. *Saul's fear of David—He gives David his daughter in marriage.*

Saul was sensible that he had lost the favourable presence of God himself, and that David had it; for this reason he feared him. Those who design ill against others, are commonly willing to have it thought that others design ill against them.

For a long time David was kept in continual apprehension of falling by the

hand of Saul, yet he persevered in meek and respectful behaviour towards his persecutor. He was removed from court under the pretence of being preferred, and in his new situation acted with so much wisdom, and discovered such evident signs of being favoured with the Divine presence and blessing, that he gained the esteem of the whole nation. This increased Saul's enmity. He was then sent to fight against the philistines that he might perish in the battle. Upon his return victorious, he met with contempt; the king's eldest daughter, who had been promised to him, was given to another. An offer of the youngest daughter was now made to David. He accepted it, and was again successful in the dangerous service, and became the king's son-in-law. Yet Saul continued to be enraged against him. David, however, continued to exercise a singular meekness of wisdom in all his deportment, and was beloved and celebrated throughout the land.—How uncommon is such prudence and discretion, especially under insults and provocations! Let us inquire if we resemble this part of the exemplary character before us. Are we "behaving ourselves wisely in all our ways?" Is there no sinful omission, no rashness of spirit, no impropriety of conduct? Opposition and perverseness in others will not excuse wrong tempers in us, but should increase our circumspection, and attention to the duties of our station.—(60.)

Consider Him that endured contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds, Heb. 12. 3.

David speaks highly of the honour offered him, to be son-in-law to the king! Though the king was in his original as mean as himself, and in his management very blamable, yet he speaks of him and the royal family with all due respect. Religion is so far from teaching us to be rude and unmannerly, that it does not allow us to be so. He speaks humbly of himself. Who am I, and what is my life? It well becomes us, however God has advanced us, always to have low thoughts of ourselves. He that humbleth himself, shall be exalted. If David thus magnified the honour of being son-in-law to king Saul, how should we magnify the honour of being sons to the King of kings! Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us! Who are we that we should be thus dignified! If we

commit our souls, and bodies, and characters, and interests, our way and work into the hands of the Lord, he will bring all to pass that is good for us, and carry us safely through all, to that blessed world where treachery, envy, and malice find no admission, but perfect love will prevail for evermore.

David, in the destruction of the philistines, acted contrary to no rules of religion and morality; for the men he destroyed were the enemies of his country, and actually at war with it.—*Chandler.*

CHAPTER XIX.

Ver. 1—7. *Jonathan reconciles his father to David.*

Saul spake to his son and all his servants, that they should kill David. A friend in need is a friend indeed: such a one Jonathan was to David. His intercession prevailed. God inclined the heart of Saul to hearken to the voice of Jonathan. How forcible are right words! Saul was, for the present, convinced of the unreasonableness of his enmity to David. Jonathan brought him to Saul, and he was in his presence as in times past, hoping that now the storm was over, and that his friend Jonathan would be instrumental to keep his father always in this good mind.

Ver. 8—10. *David again vanquishes the philistines—Saul again tries to slay him.*

David could not confide in Saul's assurances, but was willing to keep in the way of his duty, and to put his trust in God. He was willing to fight against the philistines, and to expose himself to their swords and Saul's envy. Nor did he decline playing upon the harp before him, though he saw the javelin in his hand, and before had so narrowly escaped. He learned to render good for evil, and to trust God with his safety, in the way of his duty. Saul continued his malice against David. He that but the other day had sworn by his Maker that David should not be slain, now endeavours to slay him himself. So implacable, so incurable is the enmity of the seed of the serpent against that of the woman; so deceitful and desperately wicked is the heart of man without the grace of God, Jer. 17. 9. To these preservations, among others, David often refers in the Psalms, when he speaks of God being his shield and buckler.

Ver. 11—17. *David preserved by Michal.*

Michal's fidelity to her husband was

commendable; David only sought to preserve his life from the malice of Saul. Her stratagem to gain time till David got to a distance was allowable, but her direct falsehood, ver. 17, had not even the plea of necessity to excuse it. Her answer was an injury to David, and manifests that she was not influenced by the same spirit of piety which had dictated Jonathan's language to Saul. The whole account shows the savage cruelty of Saul, and the extreme danger to which David was exposed. And now it was that he composed the fifty-ninth Psalm, which shows that his mind was calm, and, in this great danger, his faith was strong and fixed on God; and whereas the plot was to slay him in the morning, he speaks there with the greatest assurance, ver. 16, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning.

16. Or rather the net-work of goat's hair at the pillow. Curtains of this sort were and are used in the east to keep off insects.—*Greenfield*. To enter the apartment of females in the east is considered the extreme of violence. Psalm 11 is supposed to refer to this flight of David.

Ver. 18—24. *David fleeth to Samuel—Saul and his messengers prophesy.*

David having escaped in the night from his own house, fled not to Bethlehem, but to Samuel, and told him all that Saul had done to him. Because Samuel had given him assurance of the crown, and his faith in that assurance now beginning to fail, and he being ready to say in his haste, (or, in his flight, as some read it, Psa. 116. 11,) All men are liars, whither should he go but to Samuel for such encouragements, in this day of distress, as would support his faith? In flying to Samuel, he made God his refuge, trusting in the shadow of his wings; where else can a good man think himself safe? Samuel, as a prophet, was best able to advise him what to do in this day of distress. In the psalm he composed the night before, he had lifted up his prayer to God, and now he takes the first opportunity of going to Samuel, to receive direction and instruction from God. He met with little rest or satisfaction in Saul's court, therefore went to seek it in Samuel's church. And, doubtless, what little pleasure is to be had in this world, those have who live a life of communion with God; to that David returned in the time of trouble, Psa. 27. 4—6.

Samuel and David went to Naioth, where the school of the prophets was, and dwelt there. Saul, having notice of it,

sent officers to seize David: when they returned not, he sent a second and third time, and hearing no tidings of them, he went himself. So impatient was he in his thirst after David's blood, so restless to compass his design against him, that although baffled by one providence after another, he could not perceive that David was under the special protection of God. When the messengers came into the congregation where David was among the prophets, the Spirit of God came upon them, and they prophesied, they joined the rest in praising God. Saul himself was likewise seized with the spirit of prophecy, before he came to the place. One would have thought that so bad a man had been in no likelihood of becoming a prophet; yet when God will take this way to protect David, even Saul prophesies. He stripped off his royal robe, and warlike habiliments, and fell into a trance or a rapture, which continued all that day and night. The saints at Damascus were delivered from the rage of the New Testament Saul, by a change wrought on his spirit, but of another nature. This was only amazing, but that sanctifying. This for a day, that for ever. Many have great gifts, yet no grace; they may prophesy in Christ's name, and yet are disowned by him, Matt. 7. 22.

Had it been in David's or Samuel's heart, it was now in their power to have destroyed Saul. A noble evidence this of the innocence and loyalty of David, Samuel, and the prophets; at the same time it is a most pleasing instance of the Divine care, and of the impotence of human malice towards those whom God is determined to preserve.—(13.)

Let us daily seek for renewing grace, which shall be in us as a well of water springing up into everlasting life. Let us cleave to truth and holiness with full purpose of heart. In every danger and trouble let us seek protection, comfort, and direction, in God's ordinances, and in the society of his ministers and people.

24. Naked, often means putting off the upper garments only.

Saul took off his outer garments, and thus appeared like the rest of the prophets, a plain, disarmed man.

CHAPTER XX.

Ver. 1—10. *David consults with Jonathan for his safety.*

We have seen the use of the long and

severe persecution of the son of Jesse. We shall have to observe him as a man of sorrows, yet the constant object of Divine care. It was the purpose of God to set him on the throne, and nothing could prevent it. The trials he met with prepared him for his future advancement. The Lord watched over him with parental tenderness, fought for him, administered strong consolations, and gave him a happy issue out of all his afflictions. Thus he deals with those whom he prepares unto glory. He does not put them into immediate possession of "the kingdom," but leads them to it through much tribulation, which he makes the means of fitting them for it. Let them not murmur at his gracious appointment, nor distrust his care; but let them look forward with joyful expectation to the crown which is laid up for them.—(60.)

Jonathan was a friend that loved at all times; loved David as well now in distress, and bid him welcome as freely, as when he was in triumph. David endeavours to convince him, that Saul sought his life, notwithstanding his innocence. Jonathan, from filial respect, was very loth to believe that his father designed, or would ever do so wicked a thing. Sometimes it appears to us that there is "but a step between us and death;" at all times it may be so, and we should prepare for the event. But though dangers appear most threatening, we cannot die till the purpose of God concerning us be accomplished, and till we have served our generation according to his will if we are believers.

We blame not David for using with all diligence the means of safety, but it became him to believe the word of God, and to be satisfied that Paul should not prevail against him. Faith is not to supersede, but to encourage our endeavours, and to assure us of a successful end. Are we bowed down with a sense of guilt? Lay hold on the promise that Christ will cast out none that come unto him.—(61.)

Jonathan generously offers David his services. Whatsoever thou desirest—he needed not insert a proviso of lawful and honest, for he knew David too well to think he would ask anything otherwise—I will even do it for thee. This is true friendship. Thus Christ testifies his love to us, Ask, and it shall be done for you; and we must testify our love to him, by keeping his commandments.

David only desires him to satisfy himself, and then to satisfy him, whether Saul really designed his death. The method of trial he proposes would certainly discover how Saul stood affected to him. Saul was rejected of God, and the Spirit of the Lord was departed from him, and yet he kept up his observance of the holy feasts. The excuse David desires Jonathan to make for his absence, we have reason to think, was true; that he was invited by his elder brother to Bethlehem his own city, to celebrate this new moon with his relations there. The family of David was a religious family. The arguments he uses with Jonathan to persuade him to do this kindness, are very pressing, and calculated to touch the tenderest feelings of the heart of Jonathan.

Ver. 11—23. *Jonathan's covenant with David.*

Jonathan thought it requisite, solemnly to renew the professions of his friendship to David. He faithfully promises him that he would let him know how he found his father affected towards him. For the confirmation of his promise, he appeals to God as a witness and as a judge. He expresses himself thus solemnly, that David might be abundantly assured of his sincerity. And thus God has confirmed his promises to us, that we might have strong consolation, Heb. 6. 17, 18. He engages David to be a friend to his family when he was gone. This he spoke from natural affection to his children. It also bespeaks his firm belief of David's advancement, and that it would be in the power of his hand to do kindness or unkindness to his seed. This kindness he calls the kindness of the Lord, because it is such kindness as the Lord shows to those whom he takes into covenant with himself; for he is a God to them, and to their seed; they are beloved for their Father's sake. It was in remembrance of this covenant, that David was kind to Mephibosheth, 2 Sam. 9. 7; 21. 7. It will be a kindness to ourselves and ours, to secure an interest in those whom God favours, and to make his friends ours. True friendship rests upon a firm basis: it is stronger than death, and is able to silence ambition, self-love, and undue relative affection. But who can comprehend the love of Jesus, who gave himself as a sacrifice for rebellious, polluted sinners? what then ought not to be the force and effects of our love to him, to his cause, and his people?

12. Or, As the Lord God of Israel liveth.—*Kennicott.*

16. May He punish all David's enemies, consequently me also if I become one of them.

19. "On the third day thou shalt go down quickly, and come to the place where thou didst hide thyself when this business was agitated." See ch. 19. 2.—*Holden.*

Ver. 24—34. *Saul, missing David, seeks to kill Jonathan.*

Jonathan is here effectually convinced of that which he was so loth to believe—that his father had implacable enmity to David. The king sat upon his seat to feast upon the peace-offerings as at other times, yet had his heart full of envy and malice against David. He should first have been reconciled to him, and then have come and offered his gift; but, instead of that, he hoped, at this feast, to shed the blood of David. What an abomination was that sacrifice which was brought with such a wicked mind as this! Prov. 21. 27. None more constant than David in attending holy duties; nor had he been absent now, but that self-preservation obliged him to withdraw. In imminent peril present opportunities may be waved. Christ himself withdrew often, till he knew that his hour was come. Saul missed David, but said within himself, Some ceremonial pollution has befallen him, which forbids him to eat of the holy things. Blessed be God, no uncleanness is now a restraint upon us, but what we may by faith and repentance be washed from in the fountain opened, Psal. 26. 6.

David is inquired for the second day. Saul asks for him, as if he were not pleased that he should be absent from a religious feast. This should be an example to masters of families to see that those under their charge be not absent from the worship of God, either in public or in the family. It is bad for us, except in case of necessity, to omit any opportunity of stately attending on God in solemn ordinances. Thomas lost a sight of Christ by being once absent from a meeting of the disciples. But Saul was displeased that hereby he missed the opportunity of killing David.

Jonathan made his excuse. Saul here-upon broke out into a most extravagant passion. David was out of his reach, but he falls upon Jonathan for his sake. Jonathan did wisely and well for himself and family, to secure an interest in David, yet for this he is blamed as most impolitic. It is good to take God's people for our people. It will prove to our ad-

vantage at last, however, for the present, it may be thought a disparagement, and a prejudice to our secular interest. See how ill Saul's passion looks; let it warn us against indulgence of any thing like it in ourselves. Jonathan is sorely grieved by his father's barbarous passion. He was troubled for his father, he was grieved for David, and troubled for himself too, because his father had done him shame, and though most unjustly, yet he must submit to it. Saul was now outrageous. What fools, what savage beasts and worse, does anger make men! Jonathan was fully satisfied that evil was determined against David; he rose from table, thinking it high time when his life was struck at, and would eat no meat, for they were not to eat of the holy things in their mourning. He that is cruel troubles his own flesh, Prov. 11. 17.

* 30. Among eastern nations it is the extremity of abuse to speak evil of the mother of any one. Park relates the expression of an african, "Strike me, but do not curse my mother." This strongly marks the ungoverned and disordered state of Saul's mind. See also the marginal reading.

Ver. 35—42. *Jonathan takes leave of David.*

Here is Jonathan's faithful performance of his promise, to give David notice of the result of his dangerous experiment. He gave David the signal, and finding the coast clear and no danger of a discovery, he presumed upon one minute's personal conversation with David, after he had bid him flee for his life. Here is the most sorrowful parting of these two friends, who, it appears, never came together again but once, and that was by stealth in a wood, ch. 23. 16. They took leave with the greatest affection imaginable. The separation of two such faithful friends was equally grievous to both, but David's case was the more deplorable, for David was leaving all his comforts, even those of God's sanctuary. They referred to the covenant of friendship that was between them, comforting themselves with that in this mournful separation. We have sworn both of us, in the name of the Lord, for ourselves and our heirs, that we and they will be faithful and kind to each other from generation to generation. Thus while we are at home in the body, and absent from the Lord, this is our comfort, that he has made with us an everlasting covenant. Christians need not sorrow as men without hope; being one with Christ, they are one with each other, and will meet in

his presence ere long to part no more ; to meet where all tears shall be wiped from their eyes.

40. "Artillery," the bow, quiver, and arrows.

42. *Delany* considers that David was thus deeply affected by a sense of Jonathan's generosity, rather than his own danger, and that Jonathan, desirous to prevent his being wholly cast down, repressed his own grief, and concluded the conference in the religious and calm manner here stated.

CHAPTER XXI.

Ver. 1—9. *David obtains the shew-bread and Goliath's sword from Ahimelech.*

From henceforward to the end of this book we find David treated as an outlaw and traitor ; we find him shifting from place to place for his own safety, and Saul pursuing him. His troubles are very particularly related in this and the following chapters, not only to be a key to the psalms, but that he might be, as other prophets, an example, to the saints in all ages, of suffering affliction and of patience ; especially that he might be a type of Christ, who, being anointed to the kingdom, humbled himself, and was therefore highly exalted. But the example of the suffering Jesus was without a blot, that of David was not so, witness the records of this chapter ; justly are troubles called temptations, for many are by them drawn into sin.

David, in distress, fled to the tabernacle of God, then pitched at Nob. He foresees he must now be an exile, and therefore came to the tabernacle to take leave of it, for nothing will be more afflictive to him in his banishment, than distance from the house of God, and restraint from public ordinances, as appears by many of his psalms. Also, to inquire of the Lord there, and to beg direction in the way both of duty and safety, his case being difficult and dangerous. That this was his business, appears ch. 22. 10. It is a great comfort to us in a day of trouble, that we have a God to go to, to whom we may open our case, and from whom we may ask and expect direction.

Ahimelech was afraid of incurring Saul's displeasure by entertaining David, and took notice how mean a figure he now made to what he used to make. David solicited Ahimelech to supply his present wants, ver. 2, 3. He told Ahimelech a gross untruth. What shall we say to this ? The scripture does not conceal it, and we dare not justify it : it was ill done,

and proved of bad consequence ; for it occasioned the death of the priests of the Lord, as David reflected upon it afterward with regret, ch. 22. 22. People should be free with their faithful ministers. David was a man of great faith and courage, yet now both failed him ; he fell thus foully through fear and cowardice, and owing to the weakness of his faith. Had he trusted God aright, he would not have used such a sorry, sinful shift for his own preservation. It is written, not for our imitation, no, not in the greatest straits, but for our admonition. Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall ; and let us all pray daily, Lord, lead us not into temptation. Let us all take occasion from this to lament, 1. The weakness and infirmity of good men ; the best are not perfect on this side heaven. There may be true grace where yet there are many failings. 2. The wickedness of bad times, which forces good men into such straits as prove temptations too strong for them. Oppression makes a wise man do foolishly.

David asked of Ahimelech bread and a sword. The necessity being urgent, Ahimelech supposed they might eat the shew-bread. David pleads that the bread is in a manner common, now that what was primarily the religious use of it, was over ; especially (as our margin reads it) when there is this day other bread sanctified in the vessel, and put in the room of it upon the table. This was David's plea, and the Son of David approved it, and showed from it, that mercy is to be preferred to sacrifice ; that ritual observances must give way to moral duties ; and that things may be done in case of urgent necessity, which may not otherwise be done. Christ brought it to justify his disciples in plucking the ears of corn on the sabbath day, for which the pharisees censured them, Matt. 12. 3, 4. Believers are spiritual priests, and the offerings of the Lord shall be their inheritance ; they eat the bread of their God.

David could not use Saul's armour, for he had not proved it ; but of this sword of Goliath he had made trial. Two things we may observe concerning this sword. 1. That God had graciously given it him, as a pledge of his singular favour ; so that it would be a support to his faith, by bringing to mind that great instance of the particular care and countenance of the Divine providence. Experiences are

great encouragements. 2. That he had gratefully dedicated it to God, as a token of thankfulness; and now in his distress it stood him greatly in stead. What we devote to God's praise, and serve him with, is most likely to redound to our own comfort and benefit. What we gave, we have from him.

One of Saul's servants was then attending before the Lord, Doeg, who proved a base traitor to David and to Ahimelech. He was a proselyte to the religion of Israel, perhaps to obtain preferment from Saul, and he was at this time performing some vow; but as he did not love the ordinances of God, his attendance was constrained, his heart was elsewhere.

Doeg set his foot as far within the tabernacle as David did. We little know with what hearts people come to the house of God, nor what use they will make of their pretended devotion. If many come in simplicity of heart to serve their God, others perhaps come to observe their teachers, and to prove accusers. Only God and the event can distinguish between a David and a Doeg, when both are in the tabernacle.—(34.)

Psalms 17. 52. 109. 35. 140. are supposed to refer to the wicked, persecuting conduct of Doeg. Ver. 10—15. *David at Gath feigns himself mad.*

David, though king elect, is here an exile, begging his bread. God's providences sometimes seem to run counter to his promises, for the trial of his people's faith, and the glorifying his name, in the accomplishment of his counsels, notwithstanding all difficulties. Achish king of Gath would now have protected him, but he was afraid of disobliging his own people. God's persecuted people have often found better usage from philistines than israelites. Though David had some reason to put confidence in Achish, yet, when he perceived the servants of Achish jealous of him, he began to be afraid that Achish would be obliged to deliver him up. David now learned by experience, what he has taught us, *Psa. 118. 9*, that it is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in princes. At this time David penned the fifty-sixth psalm, when the philistines took him in Gath, where having showed before God his distresses, he resolved, *ver. 3*, What time I am afraid I will trust in thee; and therefore, *ver. 11*, will not be afraid what man can do unto me. But this so alarmed David, that he feigned himself mad, which gave

Achish the opportunity of driving him away without employing him or hurting him. Such conduct was degrading, and discovered a wavering in his faith and courage. However, he soon recovered his composure, and *Psalm 34*, which David penned upon this occasion, shows, that he did not change his spirit when he changed his behaviour, but even in the greatest difficulties and hurries, his heart was fixed, trusting in the Lord. He concludes that psalm with this assurance, that none that trust in God shall be desolate, though they may be, as he now was, solitary and distressed, persecuted but not forsaken. But the more simply we depend upon God, and obey him, the more comfortably and surely we shall walk through this troublesome world.

See *Psalms 56 and 34.*

CHAPTER XXII.

Ver. 1—5. *David at Adullam—Many resort to him.*

David sheltered himself in the cave of Adullam. Thither his relations resorted to him for protection, and to afford him assistance. With them came a number of persons of broken fortunes and unsettled minds, of whom he formed a small army. But they acted entirely upon the defensive, and protected the country. We may suppose that David's instructions, devotions, and example, produced a great change in their temper and behaviour. The first three of his worthies were those who first owned him when he was in the cave; see *1 Chron. 11. 15, &c.* The promise of the kingdom implied a promise of preservation to it, yet David used proper means for his own safety, else he had tempted God. He did not do any thing that aimed to destroy Saul, but only to secure himself. In all our difficulties we should be willing to wait till we know what God will do for us. Perhaps the apostle refers to this instance of David, among others, when he speaks of some of the Old Testament worthies that wandered in deserts, in dens and caves of the earth, *Heb. 11. 38*. At this time David penned the 142d Psalm, entitled, *A prayer when he was in the cave*; there he complains that no man would know him, and that refuge failed him, but hopes that shortly the righteous should compass him about. See what weak instruments God sometimes uses, to bring about his own purposes. The Son of

David is ready to receive distressed souls, who will appoint him their Captain, and be commanded by him. He receives all who come unto Him, however vile and miserable; he changes them into a holy people, and employs them in his service: those who would reign with him must be contented first to suffer with and for him.

David took care to settle his parents in a place of safety. Observe here with what a tender concern he provided for his aged parents. The first thing he does is to find them a quiet habitation, whatever became of himself. Let children learn from hence to show piety at home, and to requite their parents, 1 Tim. 5. 4, in every thing consulting their ease and satisfaction; though ever so highly preferred, and ever so much employed, let them not forget their aged parents. Also see with what humble faith he expects the issue of his present distress, Till I know what God will do for me. He expresses his hopes very modestly, as one that entirely cast himself upon God, and committed his way to him, expecting a good issue, not from his own arts, or arms, or merits, but from what the wisdom, power, and goodness of God would do for him. He had the advice and assistance of Gad, who being a prophet, would pray for him, and instruct him in the mind of God; and David, though himself a prophet, was glad of his assistance. By his advice he went into the land of Judah; and appeared publicly, as confident of his own innocence, and well assured of the Divine protection, and desirous, even in his present hard circumstances, to do service to his tribe and country. Thus are the steps of a good man ordered by the Lord. And though oppression often forces men into measures to which they were utterly averse, and deprives the community of its most useful members, yet the Lord will preserve his people for their appointed work, however they may be hated and exposed.

2. The original words by which these men are described by no means necessitate us to think they were abandoned and infamous characters. The hebrew denotes such straits and difficulties as the best and worthiest men may be in. The jews frequently used their debtors with great severity. Some among them, no doubt, were like some of all other troops.—*Chandler*. Whether these were good men when they resorted to David, is not easy to say, but if they were not, that they became so by his discipline, influence, and example is sufficiently evident from their subsequent behaviour.—*Delany*.

Ver. 6—19. *Saul pursues David, and orders Doeg to destroy the priests of Nob.*

Saul pitched his tent, or set up his standard, on some eminence, near Gibeah, and threatened vengeance against all who did not join him in persecuting David. The progress of human nature, instigated by Satan's temptations, is from bad to worse. Envy, malice, and jealousy torment the soul with ideal miseries. The wretch who is under their dominion suspects every one of enmity and treachery, breaks through the bonds of honour and conscience, and is hurried on to revenge.

See here the nature of jealous malice, and its pitiful arts to extort discoveries of things that are not. Saul looks upon all about him as his enemies, because they do not just say as he says. He got information from Doeg against Ahimelech the priest. A partial statement of facts is effectually bearing false witness. The king sent for him and all the priests who then attended the sanctuary, and they, not being conscious of any guilt, and therefore not apprehensive of any danger, came all of them to the king. In Ahimelech's answer to Saul we have the language of conscious innocence. But Saul was forsaken of God, and given up to Satan and his own vile passions, and would hearken to nothing but the suggestions of revenge and jealousy. Saul himself gives judgment. Thou shalt surely die, thou and all thy father's house. The sentence was pronounced in passion, not for the support of justice, but for the gratification of brutish rage. God having rejected Saul, and ordered another to be anointed in his room, he seems well pleased with this opportunity of being avenged on the priests of the Lord, since God himself was out of his reach. What wickedness will not the evil spirit hurry men to when he gets the dominion! He alleges that which was utterly false and unproved. The footmen had more sense and grace than their master. Though they might expect to be punished for their refusal, yet they would not fall upon the priests of the Lord; such reverence had they for their office, and such a conviction of their innocence.

Saul's mind was blinded, and his heart hardened. The most bloody tyrants have found instruments of their cruelty as barbarous as themselves. Doeg is no sooner commanded to fall upon the priests, than he does it willingly, and meeting

with no resistance, slays on that same day eighty-five priests that were of the age of ministration, between twenty and fifty, for they wore a linen ephod, and perhaps were slain in them. Doeg, having murdered the priests, went to their city Nob, and put all to the sword there. We may see in this the desperate wickedness of Saul when the Spirit of the Lord was departed from him. Nothing so vile but those may be hurried to it who have provoked God to give them up to their hearts' lusts. Yet this was the accomplishment of threatenings long since pronounced against the house of Eli; for Ahimelech and his family were descendants from him. Though Saul was unrighteous in doing this, yet God was righteous in permitting it. Now God performed against Eli that, at which the ears of them that heard it must tingle. No word of God shall fall to the ground.

Ver. 20—23. *Abiathar escapes to David.*

David greatly lamented the calamity. It is a great trouble to a good man to find himself any way an occasion of the calamities of the church and ministry. Upon recollection, David had feared this consequence from Doeg's known character. His feelings must have been exceedingly pained when he considered that his falsehood was one cause of this fatal event. He granted protection to Abiathar. David now speaks with assurance of his own safety, and promises that Abiathar should have the full benefit of his protection. It is promised to the Son of David, that God will hide him in the shadow of his hand, Isa. 49. 2, and with him all who are his may be sure that they shall be in safeguard, Psa. 91. 1. David had now not only a prophet, but a priest, a high priest, with him, to whom he was a blessing, and they to him. He at this time penned the 52d Psalm, wherein he represents Doeg not only as malicious and spiteful, but as false and deceitful; because though what he said was, for the substance, true, yet he put false colours upon it, with a design to do mischief. In the hurry and distraction David was continually in, he found time for communion with God, and found comfort in it.

20. By the massacre of the priests, Saul weakened the power of those whom he had made his enemies, and obtained their possessions to bestow upon his followers. It was a most decided act of defiance to the Most High.—*Delany.*

—Saul hereby for ever deprived himself of the protection and counsel of Jehovah. Abiathar fled

with the ephod in which was the judgment of Urim, and David thereby received the fullest and plainest directions in circumstances of danger and difficulty.—*Chandler.*

(*Read 1 Chron. 12. 8—19; 11. 15—19.*)

CHAPTER XXIII.

Ver. 1—6. *David, after inquiring of the Lord, rescues Keilah.*

When princes begin to persecute God's people and ministers, let them expect vexation on all sides. The way for any country to be quiet, is to let God's church be quiet in it; if Saul fight against David, the philistines fight against his country. David still considered himself the protector of the land, and was ready to employ his men in any service to which the Lord was pleased to appoint him, even when sure to be recompensed with ingratitude. Thus did the Saviour Jesus, and left us an example that we should follow in his steps. David inquired of the Lord concerning it. Though he had enough to do with the little force he had, to secure himself, yet he was concerned for the safety of his country, and could not sit still to see that ravaged; nay, he abhorred the thought of sacrificing the common welfare to his private revenge. Those are unlike David, who sullenly decline to do good, because they have not been so well considered as they deserve for their services. David inquired of the Lord by the prophet Gad; for it should seem by ver. 6, that Abiathar came not to him with the ephod till he was in Keilah. It is our duty, and will be our ease and comfort, whatever happens, to acknowledge God in all our ways, and to seek direction from him. To satisfy his men, David inquired of the Lord again, and received a full commission, and a full assurance of victory.

Ver. 7—13. *God warneth David, and he escapes from Keilah.*

As the inhabitants of Keilah would fear the dreadful fate of Nob, ch. 22. 19, David could not confide in their assurances. He inquired of God, and was informed that they would deliver him up, though, perhaps, as yet they had not meditated such ingratitude and treachery. Well might David complain of his enemies, that they rewarded him evil for good, and that for his love they were his adversaries, Psa. 35. 12; 109. 4. Christ was used thus basely, John 10. 32. Saul impiously connected God with his cause, because he thought he had gained one

point. David prayed, Psa. 140. 8, Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked : further not his wicked device ; lest they exalt themselves. We must not think that one smiling providence justifies an unrighteous cause, or secures its success.

David applied to his great Protector for direction. No sooner was the ephod brought him, ver. 6, than he made use of it ; Bring hither the ephod. We have the scriptures, those lively oracles, in our hands, let us take advice from them in doubtful cases. Bring hither the bible. David's address to God upon this occasion is very solemn and reverent. Also very particular and express. His inquiries are very particular. God allows us to be so in our addresses to him ; Lord, direct me in this matter, about which I am now at a loss. God knows all men better than they know themselves, knows their strength, what is in them, and what they will do if they come into such and such circumstances. He knows not only what will be, but what would be if it were not prevented ; therefore knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and how to render to every man according to his works. God delivered David out of Saul's hand, as a bird out of the snare of the fowler. Thus does God baffle the designs of his people's enemies, and turn their counsels headlong.

Ver. 14—18. *Jonathan comes to David, and comforts him.*

David made no attempt against Saul ; he kept God's way, waited God's time, and was content to secure himself in woods and wildernesses, though with some it might seem a reproach to that courage for which he had been famous. We must lament his hard fate ; that an innocent man should be thus put in fear of his life, that a man of honour should be thus disgraced, a man of merit thus recompensed for his services, and a man that delighted in the service both of God and his country, should be debarred from both, and wrapt up in obscurity. What shall we say to this ? Let it make us think the worse of this world, which often gives such bad treatment to its best men : let it reconcile even great and active men to privacy and restraint, if Providence make that their lot, for it was David's ; and let it make us long for that kingdom where goodness shall for ever be in glory, and holiness in honour, and the righteous shall shine as the sun.

Saul sought David every day, so restless was his malice ; but God delivered him not into his hand, as Saul hoped, ver. 7 ; unless God had delivered him into his hand, he could not prevail against him. We find Jonathan comforting him, as his faithful friend. As a *pious* friend, he directed him to God, the Foundation of his confidence, and the Fountain of his comfort. David, though a strong believer, needed the help of his friends for the perfecting what was lacking in his faith ; herein Jonathan was helpful, by reminding him of the promise of God, and his many experiences of God's goodness. Thus he strengthened his hands for action, by encouraging his heart, not in the creature, but in God. Jonathan was not able to do any thing to strengthen him, but assured him God would. As a *self-denying* friend, he takes pleasure in the prospect of David's advancement to that honour which was his own birthright. This, he tells him, Saul knew very well. Whence appears what a wicked man Saul was, to persecute one whom God favoured ; and what a foolish man, in thinking to prevent what God had determined, and which would certainly come to pass. How could he disannul what God had purposed ? As a *constant* friend, he renewed his friendship with him. True love takes delight in repeating its engagements, giving and receiving fresh assurances of the firmness of the friendship. Our covenant with God should be often renewed, and therein our communion with him kept up. David and Jonathan now parted, and never met together again, that we find, in this world. Jonathan said what he wished, not what he had ground to expect, when he promised himself that he should be next to David in his kingdom.

Jonathan's conduct widely differed from his father's with respect to David's succession to the crown, an event which both of them foresaw would certainly come to pass. Jonathan quietly submitted to it, as an appointment of God ; while Saul was for moving earth and hell, if possible, to prevent it. But Jonathan was so far from being a secret rebel and traitor against his father, that he showed himself most affectionately concerned for his honour while he lived, and died fighting in his defence. Saul's affectionate regard to Jonathan is abundantly evident in that much of his implacable hatred to David

was occasioned by the apprehension that if he lived Jonathan would not succeed to the kingdom. So true was what David said of them, 2 Sam. 1. 23. The friendship of Jonathan and David was warm and constant, founded on principles of true honour, and thoroughly consistent with all the obligations of true religion and virtue.—(13.)

If the converse of one friend, at one interview, gives comfort, and strengthens our hearts, what may not be expected from the continual supports, daily visits, and powerful love of the Saviour of sinners, the covenanted Friend of believers!

Ver. 19—29. *David rescued from Saul by an invasion of the philistines.*

The israelites in general were averse to Saul's persecution of David; he therefore considered these ziphites as his only friends. In the midst of his wickedness, Saul affected the language of piety; whether he deceived himself, or desired to mislead others, is not certain. Such expressions, without suitable effects, can only amuse or deceive those who hear, and those who use them.

David was now brought into imminent peril. He retired from the hill of Hachilah to the wilderness of Maon, and at this time penned the 54th Psalm, as appears by the title, wherein he calls the ziphites strangers, though they were israelites, because they barbarously betrayed him; but he puts himself under the Divine protection, Behold, God is my Helper, and then all shall be well. Saul pursued him closely, till there was but a mountain between them. David and his men on one side the mountain fleeing, and Saul and his men on the other pursuing; David in fear, and Saul in hope. This mountain was an emblem of the Divine Providence coming between David and the destroyer, like the pillar of cloud between the israelites and the egyptians.

David now flees as a bird to his mountain, Psal. 11. 1, and finds God to him as the shadow of a great rock. Saul hoped, with his numerous forces, to enclose David and his men; but the ground did not prove convenient for his design. A new name was given to the place in remembrance of this, The rock of division, because it divided between Saul and David. When Saul was just ready to lay hold on David, notice was brought him that the philistines were invading the land; by this means David was delivered when he

was on the brink of destruction, Saul was disappointed of his prey, and God was glorified as his wonderful Protector. The wisdom of God is never at a loss for ways and means to preserve his people. David, having escaped, took shelter in some natural fortresses, in the wilderness of En-gedi—the wilderness of Judah, where he was, when he penned the 63d Psalm, which breathes much pious and devout affection; in all places and in all conditions, he still kept up communion with God.

Do we not, upon the review of our own lives, recollect various instances in which the Lord has almost visibly interposed, to administer relief, and to bring deliverance? Let us not be dismayed at the prospect of future difficulties, but stay ourselves upon Him who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working. He can raise up for us, in the midst of our enemies, a friend tender and constant as Jonathan. Sooner than his promise shall fail, he will commission the philistines to effect our escape, at the very moment when our case appears most desperate. Nature indeed is averse, but faith will teach and enable us, to hope against hope. This entire dependence upon him God requires, for he declares, If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established, Isa. 7. 9.—(60.)

CHAPTER XXIV.

Ver. 1—7. *David spares Saul's life in a cave at En-gedi.*

When Saul had driven back the philistines, he returned to his pursuit of David, who had taken refuge in a wild, rocky part of the country. Supposing David to be at some distance, he retired into a cave. In those countries there were very large caves in the sides of the rocks or mountains, which were partly natural, but sometimes enlarged by art. In such a place David and his men were concealed; thus God delivered Saul into his hand. David's men urged very plausibly that God had brought his enemy into his power to fulfil his promises to him, yet they were greatly mistaken. It was an opportunity given to David to exercise faith and patience, to show the tendency of his religion, to confute his accusers, and for an example to all that read it. He had a promise of the kingdom, but no command to slay the king. He had been greatly injured, but was not appointed his own avenger. He aimed to perform his

present duty, and left his protection and future advancement to the Lord.

David cut off the skirt of Saul's robe, but soon repented that he had done that: though it did Saul no real hurt, and served David for a proof that it was in his power to have killed him. It is a good thing to have a heart within us, smiting us for sins that seem little; it is a sign that conscience is awake and tender, and will be the means of preventing greater sins. He reasons strongly both with himself and with his men against doing Saul any hurt. He reasons with himself, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing. Sin is a thing which it becomes us to startle at, and to resist the temptations to, not only with resolution, but with holy indignation. He reasons with his servants. He not only would not do this bad thing himself, but he would not suffer those about him to do it. Thus did he render good for evil to him from whom he had received evil for good; and was herein both a type of Christ, who saved his persecutors, and an example to all who are called christians, not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good.

3. Caves were often used to shelter and protect sheep and cattle. There are many very large caverns in Judea. Strabo mentions one of sufficient size to contain 4000 men. These caverns usually consist of several distinct cavities, with intricate passages from one part to another. There are similar caves in England, and in almost every country. A modern traveller describes the cave of En-gedi as at first not appearing lofty or spacious, but that a low passage leads into apartments where many persons might remain concealed.

Ver. 8—15. *David shows his innocence.*

Though David would not slay Saul, he endeavoured to convince him that he was wrong to persecute him thus, and persuaded him therefore to be reconciled. He proved the falseness of the suggestion upon which Saul's malice against him was grounded. David was charged with seeking Saul's hurt; he shows Saul that God's providence had given him opportunity to do it. That those about him had earnestly urged him to do it. And it was upon a good principle, that he refused to do it. Such command he had of himself, that his nature, in the midst of the greatest provocation, was not suffered to rebel against his principles. He declares it his fixed resolution never to be his own avenger. He endeavours to convince Saul, that as it was a bad thing, so it was a mean thing for him to give chase to such an inconsiderable person.

He once and again appeals to God as the righteous Judge, ver. 12, and ver. 15. The Lord judge between me and thee. The justice of God is the refuge and comfort of oppressed innocence. If men wrong us, God will right us, at furthest, in the judgment of the great day. With him David left his cause, and so rested satisfied, waiting his time to appear for him.

Ver. 16—22. *Saul acknowledges his fault.*

We may suppose Saul struck with amazement when he found how much he had lain at David's mercy. His heart must have been harder than a stone, if this had not affected him. He melted into tears, and we will suppose them real expressions of his present concern at the sight of his own iniquity, so plainly proved upon him. He speaks as quite overcome with David's kindness. And, as one that relented at the thought of his own folly and ingratitude—he lifted up his voice and wept. Many mourn for their sins, who do not truly repent of them; weep bitterly for them, yet continue in love and league with them.

He ingenuously acknowledged David's integrity, and his own iniquity. Now God made good to David that word on which he had caused him to hope, that he would bring forth his righteousness as the light, Psa. 37. 6. They who take care to keep a good conscience, may leave it to God to secure them the credit of it. We are too apt to suspect others to be worse affected toward us than really they are; and when, afterward, our mistake is discovered, we should be forward to recall our suspicions, as Saul does here.

He prays God to recompense David for his generous kindness. He owns that David's sparing him, when he had him in his power, was an uncommon instance of tenderness to an enemy. He prophesies his advancement to the throne. He knew it before. But now he knew it by the interest David had in the people, the special providence of God in protecting him, and the generous spirit he had given proof of. Sooner or later, God will force even those that are of the synagogue of Satan, to know and own those whom he has loved; Rev. 3. 9. The acknowledgment Saul made of David's title to the crown, was a great encouragement to David himself, and a support to his faith and hope. He binds David with an oath, hereafter to show the same tenderness of his seed, and of

his name, as he had now showed of his person. David swore unto him. Though he might be tempted, not only in revenge, but in prudence, to extirpate Saul's family, yet he bound himself not to do it, knowing that God could and would establish the kingdom to him and his, without the use of such bloody methods. This oath he religiously observed; he supported Mephibosheth, and executed those as traitors that slew Ishbosheth. The hanging up of several of Saul's posterity, to atone for the destruction of the gibeonites, 2 Sam. 21, was by the Divine appointment, not David's act, and therefore not the violation of this oath.

They parted in peace. Saul, for the present, let fall the persecution: he went home convinced, but not converted; ashamed of his envy to David, yet retaining in his breast that root of bitterness; vexed that, when at last he had found David, he could not at that time find in his heart to destroy him, as he had designed. God has many ways to tie the hands of persecutors, when he does not turn their hearts. David knew Saul too well to trust him, and got him up into the hold. We read of those who believed in Christ, yet he did not commit himself to them, because he knew all men. Those who like David are innocent as doves, must thus like him be wise as serpents. The grace of God teaches us to forgive our enemies, and to be kind to them; but not to trust those who have repeatedly deceived us. Malice often seems dead when it is only dormant, and will revive with double force. Yet, whether the Lord bind men's hands, or affect their hearts, so that they do not hurt us, the deliverance is from him, an evidence of his love, and an earnest of our salvation.

CHAPTER XXV.

Ver. 1. *Death of Samuel.*

Though Samuel was a great man, and well qualified for public service, he spent the latter end of his days in retirement and obscurity. Not because he was unable to perform any duties, for he presided in a college of the prophets, ch. 19. 20, but because Israel had rejected him, for which God justly chastised them, and because his desire was to be quiet, and to enjoy himself and his God in acts of devotion during his advanced years, and in this desire God graciously indulged

him. Let old people be willing to rest, though it look like burying themselves alive.

Though Samuel was a fast friend to David, for which Saul hated him, as also for dealing plainly with him, yet he died in peace, even in the worst of the days of Saul's tyranny, who he sometimes feared would kill him, ch. 16. 2. Let this remind us that Jesus our Prophet, Priest, Intercessor, and Judge, ever liveth to take care of those who trust in him. All Israel lamented Samuel, and they had reason. He was a constant intercessor for Israel, he prayed daily for them, ch. 12. 23. Those have hard hearts, who can bury faithful ministers with dry eyes; who are not sensible of the loss of those who have prayed for them, and taught them the way of the Lord. When God's providence removes our relations and friends, we ought to be humbled for our misconduct toward them while they were with us. David, hereupon, went down to the wilderness of Paran. He apprehended his danger to be greater than ever, and withdrew out of the limits of the land of Israel; now it was, that he dwelt in the tents of Kedar, Psa. 120. 5.

Ver. 2—11. *David's request to Nabal—Nabal's churlish refusal.*

We should not have heard of Nabal if there had not happened some communication between him and David. Observe his name, Nabal, A fool; so it signifies. He was of the house of Caleb, but was of another spirit. He inherited Caleb's estate; but was far from inheriting his virtues. Some ancient versions read it, He was a dogged man—of a currish disposition, surly and snappish, and always snarling. He was very great, that is, very rich; for riches make men look great in the eye of the world; otherwise, to one that takes his measures aright, he really looked very mean. Riches are common blessings, which God often gives to Nabals, to whom he gives neither wisdom nor grace. His wife was Abigail; a woman of great understanding. Many an Abigail is tied to a Nabal, and be her understanding like Abigail's, ever so great, it will be little enough for her exercises. He had no sense of honour or honesty, for he was churlish, cross, and ill-humoured; evil in his doings, hard and oppressive, a man that cared not what fraud and violence he used in getting and saving, so he could but get and save. This is the character

given of Nabal by Him who knows what every man is.

David was in such distress, that he would be glad to be beholden to Nabal, and did, in effect, come begging to his door. What little reason have we to value the wealth of this world, when so great a churl as Nabal abounds, and so great a saint as David suffers want! He chose a good time to send to Nabal, when he was to make a plentiful entertainment. Had he sent at another time, Nabal might have pretended he had nothing to spare. Observe David's message; Thus shall ye say to him that liveth, (our translators add, in prosperity,) as if those lived indeed, that live as Nabal did, with abundance of the wealth of this world about them; whereas, in truth, those that live in pleasure, are dead while they live, 1 Tim. 5. 6. David knew better things, that in God's favour is life, not in the world's smiles; and by the rough answer he was well served; for this was too smooth an address to such a muck-worm. Yet his good wishes were commendable. He pleaded the kindness Nabal's shepherds had received. Considering the character of David's men, in distress and debt, and discontented, and the scarcity of provisions, it was not without good management that they were kept from plundering. They had also protected the shepherds from being hurt by others.

Though David was anointed king, he asked not royal dainties, but, Give whatsoever comes to thy hand, and we will be thankful. One would not have imagined it possible that any man should be so rude and ill-conditioned as Nabal. He went into a passion, as covetous men are apt to do, when asked for any thing, thinking thus to cover one sin with another; and, by abusing the poor to excuse themselves from relieving them. But God will not thus be mocked. Nabal could not be ignorant how the country was obliged to David for his public services, but his narrow soul thinks not of paying any part of that debt, nor so much as to acknowledge it. He speaks of David as an inconsiderable man, not to be regarded. Think it not strange, if great men and great merits are thus disgraced.

He upbraids him with his present distress, and takes occasion to represent him as a bad man. How naturally does he speak the churlish, clownish language of those that hate to give alms! If men

bring themselves into straits by their own folly, yet they are to be pitied and helped, not trampled upon and starved. David is reduced to this distress, not by any fault, or indiscretion of his own, but by the good services he had done to his country, and the honours his God had put upon him; yet he is represented as a fugitive and runagate. Let this help us to bear reproaches and misrepresentations with patience and cheerfulness, and make us easy under them; it has often been the lot of the excellent ones of the earth. Some of the best men the world ever was blest with, were counted as the off-scouring of all things, 1 Cor. 4. 13.

Nabal insists much upon the property he had in the provisions of his table. May he not do what he will with his own? We mistake, if we think we are absolute lords of what we have, and may do what we please with it. No, we are but stewards, and must use it as we are directed, remembering it is not our own, but His that intrusted us with it.

2. Not the Carmel mentioned in the history of Elijah, 1 Kings, but another Carmel situated in the south of Judea, in the district of the tribe of Judah near the Dead sea. Maon was also situated there. The resorts of David when persecuted by Saul were all in that vicinity. Wilderness, when applied to places in Palestine, means an uncultivated district.

Ver. 12—17. *David's intention to destroy Nabal.*

David's messengers prudently restrained themselves, and told David, that he might do as he thought fit. Christ's servants, when they are abused, must leave it to him to plead his own cause, and wait till he appear in it. But see David's hasty resolution hereupon. He repented of the kindness he had done to Nabal. When we are thus requited, we should not repent of the good we have done, nor be backward to do good another time. God is kind to the evil and unthankful, and why may not we? He determined to destroy Nabal, and all that belonged to him. Is this thy voice, O David? Can the man after God's own heart speak thus unadvisedly with his lips? Has he been so long in the school of affliction, where he should have learned patience, and yet is so passionate? Is this he who used to be dumb and deaf when reproached, Psa. 38. 13, that spared Saul who sought his life, yet now will not spare any thing that belongs to him who had only put an affront upon his messengers? He at other times used to be calm and con-

siderate, but is now put into such a heat by a few hard words, that nothing will atone for them but the blood of a whole family. "Lord, what is man?" What are the best of men, when God leaves them to themselves, to try them, that they may know what is in their hearts? From Saul, David expected injuries, against those he was prepared, stood upon his guard, and kept his temper; but from Nabal he expected kindness, therefore the affront was a surprise, and by an unexpected attack put him into disorder. What need have we to pray, Lord, lead us not into temptation!

An account was given of this matter to Abigail, by one of the servants, who was more considerate than the rest, and she, being a woman of good understanding, considered what was to be done for their common safety. Prudent and pious relations are a treasure, and often retard the ruin of those who have not sense enough to know their worth.

Ver. 18—31. *Abigail takes a present and goes to meet David.*

We have here an account of Abigail's prudent management for the preservation of her husband and family from destruction. Wisdom, in such a case, was better than weapons of war. It was her wisdom, that what she did, she did quickly, and without delay; she made haste. They that desire conditions of peace, must send when the enemy is yet a great way off, Luke 14. 32. It was her wisdom, that what she did, she did herself. By a present she atoned for Nabal's denial of David's request. If he had given them what came next to hand, the messengers had gone away thankful; but Abigail prepared the very best, according to the usual entertainments of those times. She disposed of these, not to gratify her own pride or vanity, but for the necessary defence of him and his family, which otherwise had been inevitably ruined. Husbands and wives, for their common good and benefit, have joint interest in their worldly possessions. If either wastes, or unduly spends, it is robbing the other.

Her demeanour was very submissive. Yielding pacifies great offences. She puts herself into the place of a penitent, and of a petitioner. No argument is left untouched; every thing is well placed and well expressed, most pertinently and pathetically urged, and improved to the best advantage. She could not excuse

her husband's conduct, and the circumstances of the case did not allow her to conceal his infirmities; she therefore turned his well-known imprudence into an argument with David, that he should lay aside his resentment. She depends not upon her own reasonings, but God's grace to soften him, and doubts not but that grace would work powerfully; and intimates, that it was below him to take vengeance on so weak and impotent an enemy as Nabal, who, as he *would* do him no kindness, so he *could* do him no hurt. She foretells the glorious issue of his present troubles. She speaks with assurance that God would keep him safe, using a remarkable expression, The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; that is, God shall hold thy soul in life, as the expression is, Psa. 66. 9, as we firmly hold those things which are precious to us, Psa. 116. 15. Thy soul shall be treasured up in the treasure of lives, so the chaldee; Thou shalt abide under the special protection of the Divine Providence. The bundle of life is with the Lord our God, for in his hand our breath is, and our times. Those are safe, and may be easy, that have him for their Protector. Happy is the true believer; his soul is bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord his God! In the midst of dangers and enemies, his natural life is perfectly safe, till the appointed hour. The life of his soul is hid with Christ in God; because the Saviour liveth he shall live also.

The phrase is taken from the common usage of men, who bind those things in bundles which they are afraid to lose, because things that are solitary and unbound, are soon lost. The meaning of the place is, God will preserve thy life; therefore it becomes not thee unjustly and unnecessarily to take away the lives of any, especially of the people of thy God and Saviour.—(54.)

Abigail reserves this argument for the last, as very powerful with so good a man; that the less he indulged his passion, the more he consulted his peace and the repose of his own conscience. Many have done that in a heat, which they have a thousand times wished undone again. The sweetness of revenge is soon turned into bitterness. She is confident that if he pass by the offence, it will afterward yield him unspeakable satisfaction that his wisdom and grace got the better of

his passion. When tempted to sin, we should consider how it will appear on reflection. Let us never do any thing for which our own consciences will afterward have to upbraid us, and which we shall look back upon with regret. My heart shall not reproach me. Lastly, she recommends herself to his favour, Remember thine handmaid. We have reason to remember those with respect and gratitude, who have been instrumental to keep us from sin.

Ver. 32—35. *David is pacified.*

David gives God thanks for sending him this happy check in a sinful way; Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me. God is to be acknowledged in all the kindnesses our friends do to us either for soul or body. Whoever meet us with counsel, direction, comfort, caution, or seasonable reproof, we must see God sending them. We ought to be very thankful for those happy providences which are means of preventing sin. Most people think it enough if they take a reproof patiently; but few will take it thankfully, and commend those who give it, and accept it as a favour. Abigail did not rejoice more that she had been instrumental to save her husband and family from death, than David rejoiced that she had been instrumental to save him and his men from sin. David seems very apprehensive of the danger he was in, which magnified the mercy of his deliverance. He speaks of the sin as very great. He was coming to shed blood; he was coming to avenge himself with his own hand, and that is stepping into the throne of God, who has said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay. The more heinous any sin is, the greater mercy it is to be kept from it. The nearer we are to the commission of sin, the greater is the mercy of a seasonable restraint. He dismissed her with an answer of peace.

The whole transaction between David and Abigail was carried on in the most open and public manner, in the presence of David's men and Abigail's servants, in the field where they met, and was begun and finished without interruption, or any private conference between them. The meaning of David's expression is, I have accepted thy interposition for Nabal, and for thy sake will not execute my intended revenge upon him. The whole conduct of this excellent woman shows that she aimed at nothing but the preservation of Nabal and her family.—*Chandler.*

Ver. 36—39, (first part.) *Nabal, hearing of his danger, dieth.*

Nabal neither missed Abigail, nor the

provisions she took; but she found him in the midst of his jollity, little thinking how near he was to ruin, by one whom he had foolishly made his enemy. Sinners are often most secure when most in danger. Thus foolish are carnal men, who give themselves over to their pleasures. He was very drunk. A sign he was Nabal, a fool, that could not use his plenty without abusing it; could not be pleasant with his friends without making a beast of himself. There is not a surer sign that a man has but little wisdom, nor a surer way to ruin the little he has, than drinking to excess. Abigail told Nabal nothing with reference to David, for, being drunk, he was as incapable to hear reason as he was to speak it. To give good advice to those that are in drink, is to cast pearls before swine; it is better to stay till they are sober. Next morning, how is he changed! His heart overnight merry with wine, next morning heavy as a stone; so deceitful are carnal pleasures, so transient the laughter of the fool; the end of that mirth is heaviness. Drunkards are sad, when they reflect upon their own folly. Joy in God makes the heart always light. Abigail could never, by her wise reasonings, bring Nabal to repentance; her faithful reproof brings him to despair.

About ten days after, the Lord smote him that he died. David blessed God that he had kept him from killing him; Blessed be the Lord, who hath kept his servant from evil. He rejoices that Nabal died not by his hand. We should take all occasions to mention and magnify God's goodness to us, in keeping us from sin. He had thereby encouraged him, and all others, to commit their cause to God, when any way injured, with an assurance that, in his own time, he will right them, if they leave it to him.

Worldly sorrow, mortified pride, and an affrighted conscience, sometimes suffice to end the joys of the sensualist, and separate the covetous man from his wealth; but whatever the weapon, the Lord smites men with death when it pleases him.

It is just with God that they who live without grace, should die without comfort; nor can we expect better while we go on in our sins.—(34.)

Ver. 39, (last part)—44. *David taketh Abigail to wife.*

Abigail believed that David would be king over Israel, and greatly esteemed

his pious and excellent character. She deemed his proposal of marriage honourable and advantageous, notwithstanding his present difficulties, and with great humility, and doubtless, consistently with the customs of those times, consented, being willing to share his trials. Thus they who join themselves to Christ, must be willing now to suffer with him, believing that hereafter they shall reign with him.

On this occasion we have some account of David's wives. David was carried away by the corrupt custom of those times; but from the beginning it was not so, nor is it so now, Matt. 19. 4, 5.

39. David probably hoped to strengthen his interest in his own tribe by this double alliance, especially as it was weakened in that of Benjamin, by Michal being taken from him.—*Delany.*

CHAPTER XXVI.

Ver. 1—4. *Saul, informed by the ziphites, goes after David.*

Saul seems to have dropped the pursuit of David, till excited again by the officious information of the ziphites. See what need we have to pray to God, that, since we have so much corruption in our own hearts, temptation may be kept far from us. Saul readily caught at the information. How soon do unsanctified hearts lose the good impressions their convictions have made upon them!

Ver. 5—12. *David again spares Saul's life.*

David ventured into Saul's camp in the night, accompanied only by his kinsman Abishai. Saul lay sleeping in the trench, or in the midst of his carriages. Sleep, when God gives it to his beloved, is their rest and refreshment; but he can, when he pleases, make it to his enemies their imprisonment. It was a deep sleep from the Lord, who commands the powers of nature, and makes them serve his purposes as he pleases. Whom God will disable or destroy, he binds up with a spirit of slumber, Rom. 11. 8. How helpless were Saul and all his forces! All, in effect, disarmed and chained, yet nothing is done to them; they are only asleep. How easily can God weaken the strongest, befool the wisest, and baffle the most watchful! Let all his friends therefore trust him, and all his enemies fear him.

Abishai begged earnestly that David would give him leave to kill Saul, pleading that God had now delivered his enemy into his hand, and did, in effect,

bid him strike. David not only would not do this himself, but would not permit another to do it. No man could do it, and be guiltless; he feared guilt, and was concerned to be innocent more than for his safety. It would be a sinful anticipation of God's providence. Encouraged by his experience in Nabal's case, he resolved to wait till God thought fit to avenge him on Saul. He will by no means avenge himself, or force his way to the promised crown by any indirect methods. The temptation was very strong; but if he yield, he sins against God, therefore he resists the temptation, and trusts God with the issue. David however improved this opportunity, for further evidencing his own integrity. He and Abishai carried away the spear and cruse of water Saul had by his bedside. Saul's spear which he had by him for defence, and his cup of water which he had for his refreshment, were both taken from him while he slept. Thus do we lose our strength and our comfort, when we are careless and secure, and off our watch.

Ver. 13—20. *David reproves Abner, and exhorts Saul.*

David reproaches Abner, as unworthy to be captain of the life-guards, who could sleep when the king his master laid so much exposed. The hand of God locked them up in this deep sleep, for, as soon as David was out of danger, a very little thing awakened them, even David's voice at a distance roused them. David reasoned seriously and affectionately with Saul. He entered into a close argument with him concerning the trouble he still continued to give him, endeavouring to persuade Saul to let fall the persecution, and be reconciled. What troubled him was not so much that he was driven out from his own inheritance, as that he was driven out from the inheritance of the Lord, the holy land. Nor was it so much his trouble, that he was constrained to live among strangers, as that he was constrained to live among worshippers of strange gods, and thereby thrust into temptation to join them in idolatrous worship. Those who forbid our attendance on God's ordinances, do what they can to estrange us from God, and to make us heathens. We are to reckon that which exposes us to sin, the greatest injury that can be done us.

He insists upon his own innocence. He

endeavours to convince Saul that his pursuit of him was not only wrong, but much below him. He desires that the controversy might be searched into, and some proper method taken to bring it to an end. If the Lord have stirred thee up against me, either in displeasure to me, taking this way to punish me for my sins against him, though, as to thee, I am guiltless; or in displeasure to thee, if it be the effect of that evil spirit from the Lord which troubles thee; let him accept an offering from us both. Let us join in making our peace with God, and reconciling ourselves to him, which may be done by sacrifice; and then I hope the sin will be pardoned whatever it is, and the trouble, which is so great a vexation both to thee and me, will come to an end. See the right method of peace-making; let us first make God our Friend by Christ the great Sacrifice, and then all other enmities shall be slain, Eph. 2. 16; Prov. 16. 7. But, if thou art put upon it by wicked men, that incense thee against me, cursed be they before the Lord, that is, they are wicked people, and it is fit that they should be abandoned and excluded as such.

Ver. 21—25. *Saul acknowledges his sin.*

Saul acknowledges, I have played the fool. Those that sin play the fool, and err exceedingly; those especially that hate and persecute God's people, Job 19. 28. This second instance of David's fidelity seems to have affected Saul even more than the former. He confessed his guilt and folly in stronger terms, and even invited him to return. Saul repeated his good words and good wishes, and his persuasion that David would return and be very eminent. But he showed no evidence of true repentance towards God. David plainly intimated that he would not trust his promises, and expected no recompence from him; but that he referred his cause to the Lord, who would protect, deliver, and do him justice. Thus they parted, to meet no more.

Men's transgressions against God are the cause of their enmities against each other, and no reconciliation among men is firm, which is not founded in and cemented by peace with God through Jesus Christ. In sinning against God, men "play the fool, and err exceedingly." This the believer perceives, he repents of it, obtains pardon, and acts more wisely. Many others obtain a transient view of these truths who hate and close their eyes

against the light. But eternity will disclose their foolishness. Fair professions do not entitle those to confidence who have long sinned against the light—yet the confessions of obstinate sinners may satisfy us that we are in the right way, and encourage us to persevere, expecting our recompence from the Lord alone.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Ver. 1—7. *David retires to Gath.*

David's fear prevailed. He drew this dark conclusion, I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul. But, O thou of little faith, wherefore dost thou doubt? Was he not anointed to be king? Though he had no reason to trust Saul's promises, had he not all the reason in the world to trust the promises of God? His experience of the particular care of Providence ought to have encouraged him. But unbelief is a sin that easily besets even good men. When without are fightings, within are fears, and it is a hard matter to get over them. Lord, increase our faith! Consulting his own heart only, and not the ephod or the prophet, he concluded, There is nothing better for me, than that I should speedily escape into the land of the philistines. Long trials are in danger of tiring the faith and patience even of very good men. How could he expect the protection of the God of Israel, if he went out of the borders of the land of Israel? He will hereby gratify his enemies, who bid him go serve other gods, that they might have wherewith to reproach him; and will very much weaken his friends, who would not have wherewith to answer that reproach. See what need we have to pray, Lord, lead us not into temptation.

No doubt, Achish gave David a solemn promise of protection, which he could rely upon, when he could not trust Saul's promises. We may blush to think that the word of a philistine should go further than the word of an israelite, who, if an israelite indeed, would be without guile; and that the city of Gath should be a place of refuge for a good man, when the cities of Israel refuse him a safe abode. Saul sought no more again for him; this intimates, that, notwithstanding the professions of repentance he had lately made, it was only because he dared not come where David is, that he let him alone. Thus many seem to leave their

sins, but really their sins leave them; they would persist in them if they could.

David's request for leave to remove, was prudent. In a town of his own, he might more freely exercise his religion, and not have his righteous soul vexed, as at Gath, with the idolatries of the philistines. David gained a commodious settlement, not only at a distance from Gath, but bordering upon Israel, where he might keep up correspondence with his own countrymen. While he kept himself close, because of Saul, multitudes resorted to him, at least, to assure him of their sincere intentions, 1 Chron. 12. 1—22.

7. Heb. "Days and four months," days being put for a year, as Lev. 25. 29.—*Poole*.

Ver. 8—12. *David induces Achish to believe that he fought against Israel.*

While David was in the land of the philistines, he made a fierce attack upon some remains of the devoted nations. The people whom he cut off were long before doomed to destruction. The amalekites were to be all cut off; probably the geshurites and gezrites were branches of Amalek. Saul was rejected for sparing them; David made up the deficiency of his obedience before he succeeded him. It is wisdom to shun notoriety, but we must in no situation be inactive. We must always attempt somewhat in the cause of God. The fear of man is so insnaring, that we should, if we can, keep out of places where our duty will expose us to danger or reproach.

This expedition David hid from Achish, with an unbecoming equivocation. It was true, he had invaded the countries that lay south of Judah, but he made Achish believe he had invaded those that lay south in Judah. The fidelity of Achish to him, his good opinion of him, and the confidence he put in him, aggravate his sin in deceiving him thus. Let us pray with the psalmist, Remove from me the way of lying, Psa. 119. 29. An equivocation which serves the purpose of a lie, is as similar to it as a hypocrite is to a profane person—it is only better in appearance, therefore more dangerous. But though believers often manifest imperfections, they can never be prevailed upon to renounce the service of God, and to unite interests with his enemies, or finally to become the servants of sin and Satan.

What a train of evils follows from un-

belief! When we forget the Lord's past mercies, and his gracious assurances, we shall be overwhelmed with desponding apprehensions, and probably be induced to adopt some dishonourable expedient to get rid of our troubles. Are there not those, who, in anxious concern for their own preservation, and that of their families, have formed very unsuitable connexions with irreligious characters, and thus proceeded from one inconsistency to another? Nothing can so effectually establish us in holy tempers and practices, and preserve us from perplexities, as firm unshaken dependence upon the promises of God in Christ Jesus.—(60.)

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Ver. 1—6. *Achish puts confidence in David—Saul's fear when forsaken of God.*

Achish required David to assist in the war against Israel, and promised him preferment. David could not refuse without danger. If he promised assistance, and then stood neuter, or went over to the israelites, he would behave with ingratitude and treachery. If he fought against Israel, he would have sinned greatly. It seemed impossible that he should extricate himself from this difficulty with a clear conscience, but his evasive answer, intended to gain time, was inconsistent with the character of an israelite, in whom there should be no guile.

As Shunem and Gilboa lay north in the land, it would appear that Saul was negligent, or the philistines could not have marched thus far. Saul's terror arose chiefly from his guilty conscience. His contempt of Samuel, his murder of the priests, and his malicious persecution of David, dismayed his heart. Had Saul kept close to God, he needed not have been afraid at the sight of an army of philistines; but now he had provoked God to forsake him, his interest failed, his armies dwindled, and what was worse, his spirits failed him, his heart sunk within him. Troubles are terrors to the children of disobedience. In this distress, Saul inquired of the Lord. Need drives those to God, who, in the day of their prosperity, slighted his oracles and altars. He inquired in such a manner, that it was as if he had not inquired at all. It is said, 1 Chron. 10. 14, He inquired not of the Lord; for he did it faintly and coldly. He did not inquire in faith, but

with a double, unstable mind. He inquired of the Lord when it was too late, when the days of his probation were over, and he was finally rejected. Seek the Lord while he may be found. He had forfeited the benefit of all the methods of inquiry. Could he that hated and persecuted Samuel and David, who were both prophets, expect to be answered by prophets? Or he that had slain the high priest, to be answered by Urim? Or he that had sinned away the Spirit of grace, to be answered by visions? No; Be not deceived, God is not mocked.

Samuel was dead, which made the philistines more bold; had Samuel been alive, Saul might have thought that his presence and countenance, his good advice and good prayers, would have availed in his distress. Saul had put the law in execution against those that had familiar spirits, *Exod. 22. 18.* Many seem zealous against sin, when they are any way hurt by it, who have no concern for the glory of God, nor any dislike of sin as sin. Many seem enemies to sin in others, while they indulge it in themselves. Saul will drive the devil out of his kingdom, yet harbours him in his heart by envy and malice! Nothing could exceed the folly of consulting those whom, according to God's law, he had endeavoured to extirpate.

2. David's answer to Achish implies nothing like a cheerful compliance with him, to engage with his forces against his own people.--*Chandler.*

Ver. 7—19. *Saul consults a witch at Endor.*

When we deviate from the plain path of duty, every circumstance will draw us further aside, and increase our perplexity and temptation. Had one told Saul, when destroying the witches, that he himself would, ere long, consult one, he would have said, as Hazael did, What! is thy servant a dog? Who knows what mischiefs they will run into that forsake God, and are forsaken of him? He desires the woman to bring one from the dead, with whom he wished to discourse. It was necromancy, or divination by the dead, that he hoped to serve his purpose by; this was expressly forbidden by the law, *Deut. 18. 11.* Bring me up him whom I shall name, ver. 8. This supposes that it was generally taken for granted, that souls exist after death, and that, when men die, there is not an end of them; it supposes that great knowledge was attributed to separate souls.

But to think that any good souls should come up at the beck of an evil spirit, or that God, who denied a man the benefit of his own Divine institutions, should suffer him to reap any advantage by a cursed, diabolical invention, was very absurd. All real or pretended witchcraft or conjuration is a malicious or an ignorant attempt to gain intelligence or assistance from some creature, when it cannot be had from the Lord in the path of duty. Saul could not secure himself, much less secure her from Divine vengeance. He swore by the Lord that she should not be punished for violating the Lord's express commands!

Saul desires to speak with Samuel. Samuel had anointed him to the kingdom, and had formerly been his faithful friend and counsellor, and with him he wished to advise. While Samuel was living at Ramah, not far from Gibeah of Saul, and presided there in the school of the prophets, we never read of Saul's going to advise with him in any difficulties; it had been well for him if he had. Then he slighted Samuel, and perhaps hated him, looking upon him to be in David's interest: but now he is dead, "By all means, bring me up Samuel." Many who despise and persecute God's saints and ministers when living, would be glad to have them again, when they are gone. Send Lazarus to me, and send Lazarus to my father's house, *Luke 16. 24—27.*

The incantations are passed over in silence. It is much disputed who appeared. The whole narrative manifests that it was no human imposture. The text gives no intimation that it was Satan personating Samuel. The woman's incantations could have no power over a glorified spirit, but God might see good that one should come from the dead at this time. Though the woman could not be the cause of Samuel's being sent, yet Saul's inquiry might be the occasion of it. The word "disquieted" seems merely to be used in accommodation to the general notions on this subject. The woman's surprise and terror proved that it was an unusual and unexpected appearance. Saul had despised Samuel's solemn warnings in his lifetime, yet now he hoped, as it were in defiance of God, to obtain some counsel and encouragement from him—might not God permit the soul of his departed prophet to appear to Saul, confirm his former sentence, and denounce

his doom? Satan could not have predicted events without being inspired of God to do so, and it would give less encouragement to consulting the evil spirits, if Samuel were sent with this message from God. The expression, Thou and thy sons shall be with me, means no more than that they shall be in the eternal world. It expressed the existence of a future state, and determined nothing against the different conditions of the righteous and wicked therein. There appears much solemnity in God's permitting the soul of a departed prophet to come as a witness from heaven, thus sending him to confirm the word he had spoken on earth.

13. "Gods," persons full of majesty and splendour: see note, Judg. 9. 13. Or, rather, as *J. P. Smith* concludes, whatever she saw, her words imply a plurality of objects; the figure of Samuel could only be one form out of several.

We may be assured that the devil has it not in his power, in a single instance, to reverse the laws of nature without Divine permission, and we can conceive but one occasion, that of possessions, on which such permission could be given, consistently with the wisdom and goodness of God. All tales, therefore, of diabolical agency in witchcraft must undoubtedly be false; for a power which the devil has not, he cannot communicate.—*Ferriar*.

The reasons above stated, and many others urged by writers who have gone fully into the subject, render it unnecessary to show the difficulties attending the supposition that the sacred penman, Divinely inspired, should give the distinct appellation of Samuel to Satan, merely assuming the appearance of the prophet. The words in ver. 14, expressly state that it was Samuel himself that appeared. The belief of the ancient Jewish church on the subject appears from the book of Ecclesiasticus 46. 20, where it is said of Samuel, After his death he prophesied, and showed the king his end.

The whole was a special interposition of God, punishing in Saul the practice of necromancy, which was strictly forbidden in the law, and warning him of his end, or rather pronouncing the final sentence upon him, by the appearance of the spirit of Samuel, whose predictions were verified by the mournful result. The message uttered by Samuel is so much in character, and so manifestly breathes the spirit of a Divine commission, that, containing as it also does an explicit prediction which was exactly fulfilled, we must conclude that there was no deception, let sceptical commentators conjecture what they please. This asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, is assigned as one of the causes for which Saul came to an untimely end, 1 Chron. 10. 13.—*R. Watson*.

The account not only shows that the Jews believed in the doctrine of apparitions; but that in fact, such an appearance on this occasion did actually occur. As for apparitions generally, most of the accounts current among men may be resolved into illusion and superstition: still there are some which rest upon an evidence, both of circumstances and of credit and sobriety in the narrators, which renders it very difficult not to admit them. On this subject cautions may be given equally against credulity and unbelief.—*R. Watson*.

Ver. 20—25. *Saul's terror on hearing his ruin.*

We are here told how Saul received this terrible message. Those that expect any good counsel or comfort otherwise than from God, and in the way of his institutions, will be as wretchedly disappointed as Saul. The fear he was in of the power of the Philistines, ver. 5, took away his appetite, or perhaps the struggle he had with his own conscience made him nauseate food. This made him an easy prey to the fresh terror that came upon him. There was no strength in him to bear up against these heavy tidings. When God in his word speaks terror to sinners, he opens to them, at the same time, a door of hope, if they repent: but those who apply to hell for succour, must expect darkness without any glimpse of light. With difficulty he was persuaded to take so much relief as was necessary to carry him back to the camp.

Saul, though terrified even to despair, was not humbled. He confessed not his sins, offered no sacrifices, and presented no supplications. He does not seem to have been concerned about his sons or his people, or to have attempted any escape; but in sullen despair rushed upon his doom. God sets up a few such beacons for a warning not to stifle convictions, or despise the word of God. But while *one* relenting thought remains, let no sinner ever suppose himself in this case. Many inquire in vain because they are not in earnest. When therefore they meet not with encouragement, they show their own hypocrisy by giving up religious duties, and plunging again into sin. But let the inquirer, though discouraged, persevere in knocking at mercy's gate until it be opened. Let him humble himself before God, determined to live and die supplicating his favour, and he will be sure at length to succeed. In reference to ver. 19, remember, though subjects suffer with their wicked governors, and children with their parents, it is *for* their own sins; or their sufferings will work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Ver. 1—5. *David's assistance is objected to by the Philistines.*

God has many ways of extricating us out of difficulties when we can perceive no way of escape. David seems to have been undetermined how to act, and waited with a secret hope that the Lord would

help him out of his difficulty. But he seems to have been influenced too much by the fear of man in so readily consenting to attend Achish. Into this strait he brought himself by his own conduct, in quitting the land of Judah, and going among the philistines. It is strange, if those that associate themselves with wicked people, and grow intimate with them, come off without guilt, or grief, or both. It is hard to come so near the brink of sin, and not to fall in. Though God might justly have left David in this difficulty, to chastise him for his folly, yet, because his heart was upright, he would not suffer him to be tempted above what he was able, but with the temptation made a way for him to escape, 1 Cor. 10. 13. God inclined the princes of the philistines to oppose David's being employed in the battle, and to insist upon his being dismissed. Thus their enmity befriended him, when no friend was capable of doing such a kindness.

Ver. 6—11. *David dismissed by Achish.*

David in the cave was more worthy of our imitation than in the court of king Achish. He scarcely ever had a greater deliverance than when dismissed from that insnaring service. The discharge Achish gives David is very honourable. Wise and good men will gain respect, wherever they go, from all who know how to make a right estimate of persons and things, though of different professions in religion. God's people should always behave themselves so, as, if possible, to get the good word of all they have dealings with: and it is due to those who have acquitted themselves well, to give them the praise. Achish would by no means suffer him to continue in the camp. He orders him to go early, as soon as it was light, to prevent further jealousies.

David seemed anxious to serve Achish, when really anxious to leave him. The temptation to compliment and dissemble, which those are in, who attend great men, is very great, and it is extremely hard to avoid it. God's providence ordered it wisely and graciously for David. For, besides being delivered out of the dilemma to which he was reduced, it proved a happy hastening of him to the relief of his own city. Thus the disgrace which the lords of the philistines put upon him, proved, more ways than one, an advantage. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in

his way. What he does with us, we know not now, but we shall know hereafter, and shall see it was all for good.

(*Read 1 Chron. 12. 1—22.*)

CHAPTER XXX.

Ver. 1—6. *Ziklag spoiled by the amalekites—David pursues them.*

The Lord extricated David from his insnaring situation, but severely rebuked his misconduct, by the calamity that came upon Ziklag in his absence. He that had made so many enemies, ought not to have left his own concerns so defenceless. When we go abroad in the way of our duty, we may comfortably hope that God will take care of our families in our absence, but not otherwise. When we go abroad, we cannot foresee what tidings may meet us when we come home again. If, when we come off a journey, we find our tabernacles in peace, and not laid waste, as David here found his, let the Lord be praised for it.

David's men murmured against him. They looked upon him as the occasion of their calamities, by the provocation he had given the amalekites. Thus apt are we, when in trouble, to fly into a rage against those who are, any way, the occasion of our trouble, while we overlook the Divine Providence, and have not that regard to the operations of God's hand, which would silence our passions, and make us patient. This was a sore trial to the man after God's own heart. Saul had driven him from his country, the philistines had driven him from their camp, the amalekites had plundered his city, his wives were taken prisoners, and now, to complete his woe, his own familiar friends, in whom he trusted, whom he had sheltered, instead of sympathizing, and offering him any relief, threatened to stone him. Great faith must expect such severe exercises. But it is observable, that David was reduced to this extremity just before his accession to the throne. At this time, perhaps, the stroke was struck, which opened the door to his advancement. Things are sometimes at the worst with the church and people of God, when they begin to mend.

David encouraged himself in the Lord his God. His men fretted at their loss, the soul of the people was bitter; their own discontent and impatience added

wormwood and gall to the affliction and misery, and made it doubly grievous. But David bore it better, though he had more reasons than any of them to lament it; they gave liberty to their passions, but he set his graces to work, and, by encouraging himself in God, while they dispirited each other, he kept his spirit calm and sedate. Those who have taken the Lord for their God, may take encouragement from their relation to him in the worst of times. It is the duty and interest of all believers, whatever happens, to encourage themselves in God as their Lord and their God, assuring themselves that he can and will bring light out of darkness, peace out of trouble, and good out of evil, to all that love him, and are the called according to his purpose, Rom. 8. 28. It was David's practice, and he had the comfort of it; What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. When he was at his wits' end, he was not at his faith's end.

Ver. 7—15. *David pursues and overtakes the amalekites.*

No time was to be lost; and as David's troubles originated from neglecting to inquire of the Lord, he immediately consulted him by his high priest. The answer quieted the minds of his followers, and they were willing to pursue the spoilers. It is well if we get this good by our afflictions, to be reminded by them of neglected duties, and particularly are quickened by them to inquire of the Lord. See 1 Chron. 15. 13. If we thus, in all our ways, even when, as in this case, there can be no doubt they are just, acknowledge God, we may expect that he will direct our steps, as he did those of David, answering him above what he asked, with an assurance that he should recover all.

David, in tenderness to his men, would by no means urge them beyond their strength, though the case was so very urgent. The Son of David thus considers the frame of his followers, who are not all alike strong and vigorous in their spiritual pursuits and conflicts; but, where we are weak, there he is kind; nay more, there he is strong, 2 Cor. 12. 9, 10. The fatigue of their former march, and this new expedition, rendered many so faint that they could proceed no further than the brook Besor. But David's faith did not fail, he still encouraged himself in the Lord his God.

A poor egyptian lad, scarcely alive, is

made instrumental of a great deal of good to David. God chooses the foolish things of the world, with them to confound the wise. Observe his master's cruelty to him. When he fell sick, probably, being over-toiled with his work, he barbarously left him to perish in the field, when he might have brought him home, or, at least, have left him wherewithal to support himself. That master has the spirit of an amalekite, not of an israelite, who can thus use a servant worse than any one should use a beast. Justly did Providence make this poor servant, who was thus basely abused, instrumental toward the destruction of a whole army of amalekites, and his master among the rest; for God hears the cry of the oppressed. David, although this man was one that had helped to destroy Ziklag, yet, finding him in distress, generously relieved him. Though the israelites were in haste, and had no great plenty for themselves, yet they would not forbear to deliver one that was drawn unto death, nor say, Behold, we knew it not, Prov. 24. 11, 12. Those are unworthy the name of israelites, who shut up their compassion from persons in distress. We should neither do an injury, nor deny a kindness to any man; some time or other, it may be in his power to return either a kindness or an injury.

12. Three days, that is, one whole day and part of two others.

Ver. 16—20. *David defeats the amalekites and recovers what had been lost.*

David, being directed to the place where the amalekites securely celebrated their triumphs, fell upon them. Sinners are nearest to ruin, when they cry, Peace and safety, and put the evil day far from them. Nor does any thing give our spiritual enemies more advantage than sensuality, and the indulgence of the flesh. Eating and drinking, and dancing, have been the soft and pleasant way in which many have gone down to the congregation of the dead. The spoil was recovered, and brought off; nothing was lost, but a great deal gotten. Providence had so ordered, that the amalekites carefully preserved all they had taken, concluding that they kept it for themselves, though really they preserved it for the right owners. There was nothing lacking; so it proved, when they concluded all was gone: so much better is God oftentimes to us than our own

fears. Our Lord Jesus was indeed the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham; in this resembling them both, that he took the prey from the mighty, and led captivity captive, Gen. 14. 16. But this was not all. They took all that belonged to the amalekites besides. This was put in the van of the triumph, with the proclamation, This is David's spoil.

Ver. 21—31. *David's distribution of the spoil.*

When the amalekites carried away a rich booty from the land of Judah and the philistines, they spent it in sensuality; but David disposed of the spoil taken after another manner, as one who knew that justice and charity must govern us, in the use we make of whatever we have in this world. What God gives us, he designs we should do good with; not serve our lusts with. In the distribution of the spoil, David was just and kind to those who abode by the stuff. We may suppose David had instructed his soldiers, yet there were among them some wicked men and men of Belial. A while ago, they would gladly have given half their own to recover the other half, yet now they have all their own, they are not content unless they can have their brethren's too; so soon do men forget their low estate. All seek their own, and too often more than their own. Those are men of Belial indeed, who delight in putting hardships upon their brethren, and care not who is starved, so they may be fed to the full. David would by no means admit this, but ordered that those who tarried behind, should come in for an equal share in the spoils. This he did in gratitude to God. What God has given us we have from him, and therefore must use it under his direction as good stewards. Let this check us when tempted to misapply what God has intrusted us with of this world's good. God's mercy to us should make us merciful to one another. Also in justice to them. Those who are any way serviceable to the common interest ought to share in the common advantages; as in the natural body, every member has its use, and therefore shares the nourishment. He settled the matter for time to come. God appointed that the spoil of Midian should be divided between the soldiers and the whole congregation, Numb. 31. 27. This case was somewhat different, but governed by the same general rule—that we are members one of another.

David was generous and kind to all his friends. When he had given every one his own, there was a considerable remainder which he presented to his friends, the elders of Judah. Several places are named, all in or near the tribe of Judah—those who secretly favoured and assisted him when persecuted by Saul. The presents not only expressed his generosity, but were the result of true policy. Those who consider the Lord as the Giver of their abundance, will dispose of it with equity and in liberality. Instead of spending their wealth upon their lusts, they will share it with their friends, and with the poor. But our King, even Jesus, divides the spoil of his victories with the meanest of his followers. Though the rebellious are now invited to accept mercy, and to participate his favour, yet if they will not have him reign over them, they shall receive no benefit from his redemption. His blessings will be confined to his friends—to those who trust in him, love him, and keep his commandments.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Ver. 1—7. *Saul's defeat, and death by his own hand.*

Saul's time to fall is come. The objects of Divine displeasure are not only wretched themselves, but the cause of calamity to all around them. Yet, though the righteous may be involved with them in temporal troubles and death, they will be separated from them in the other world, and possess everlasting happiness while the wicked sink into everlasting misery. The death of Jonathan would be a great affliction to David, yet, by making him mindful of his own frailty, as well as by facilitating his accession to the throne, it would be an advantage. God would hereby show us, that the difference between good and bad, is to be made in the other world, not in this. All things come alike to all. We cannot judge of the spiritual or eternal state of any, by the manner of their death; for in that, there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked.

Saul, when sorely wounded, and unable to resist or to flee, expressed no concern about his immortal soul, but only desired to be speedily despatched, that the philistines might not insult over him or put him to pain. His armour-bearer revered his prince, which made him incapable of lifting up his hand against him. Thus Saul became his own murderer.

From the examples of obdurate sinners we perceive what we might have been, or what we may still be, if the grace of God prevent not. Let us then learn, under a sense of our entire depravity, to pray, Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe; and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually. It might appear surprising that the example of Saul, in destroying himself, is defended, applauded, and even imitated! Is it not almost fashionable for men who are in perplexity and distress, to seek relief in suicide? A miserable refuge indeed! Because circumstances are reduced, friends desert us, or characters become infamous, shall men presumptuously rush into the presence of their Judge by an act of the highest rebellion, and thus consign their souls to eternal perdition?—Without pronouncing upon the case of those, who, by misfortune, temptation, or disease, are deprived of understanding—where self-murder is committed, as it is in numerous instances, deliberately and with the possession of reason, there is no ground to expect forgiveness, since it is an offence for which there can be no repentance. It is also an aggravation of this sin, that the self-destroyer not only plunges himself into endless wretchedness, but involves many surviving friends and relations in the deepest affliction.—As it is the grand artifice of the devil, to persuade sinners, under extreme difficulties, to fly to this last act of desperation, it may be of use to fortify the mind against it, by a serious consideration of its heinousness before God, and its miserable consequences in society. But our security is not in ourselves. Let us seek protection from Him who keepeth Israel. Let us watch and pray; and take unto us the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.—(60.)

Ver. 8—13. *The philistines triumph—Saul's body rescued by the men of Jabesh-gilead.*

The scripture makes no mention of the souls of Saul and his sons, what became of them after they were dead; but of their bodies only: secret things belong not to us. Their dead bodies were treated basely by the philistines, who stripped Saul of his armour, and sent it to be set up as a trophy of their victory, in the house of

Ashtaroth their goddess, and we are told, 1 Chron. 10. 10, that they fastened his head in the temple of Dagon. Thus they ascribed the honour of their victory, not as they ought to have done, to the real justice of the true God, but to the imaginary power of their false gods; and by this respect paid to pretended deities, they shame those who give not the praise of their achievements to the living God.

They fastened Saul's body, and the bodies of his sons, to the wall of Beth-shan, a city that lay not far from Gilboa. Hither the dead bodies were dragged, and hung up to be devoured by birds of prey. Little more than the river Jordan lay between Beth-shan, and Jabesh-gilead, and Jordan was in that place passable by its fords. A bold adventure was therefore made by the valiant men of that city, who in the night passed the river, took down the dead bodies, and gave them decent burial, out of concern for the honour of Israel, or the land of Israel; or out of particular sense of gratitude to Saul, for his zeal and forwardness to rescue them from the ammonites, when he first came to the throne. It is a proof of a gracious spirit, and an encouragement to beneficence, when the remembrance of kindnesses is retained.

It is of little consequence in what manner, or with what circumstances we die, or what is done with our dead bodies—if our souls are saved, our bodies will be raised incorruptible and glorious—but not to fear His wrath who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell, is the extreme of folly and impiety. How ineffectual is the respect of fellow-creatures to those who are enduring the wrath of God! While pompous funerals, magnificent monuments, and the praises of men combine to honour the memory of the deceased, the soul often is suffering in the regions of darkness and despair.—May we seek that honour which cometh from God only.

This book began with the birth of Samuel; but now it ends with the burial of Saul: the comparing these two together, will teach us to prefer the honour that comes from God, before any honours this world pretends to have the disposal of.

(Read 1 Chron. 10. with this chapter.)

THE SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL.

This book is the history of the reign of king David. We had, in the foregoing book, an account of his designation to the government, and his struggles with Saul, which ended in the death of his persecutor. This book begins with his accession to the throne, and is entirely taken up with the affairs of the government during the forty years he reigned; and it gives us an account of David's triumphs and his troubles. It opens with David's accession to the throne, his gradual prevailing against the house of Saul, and his establishment in the kingdom. It relates his victories, the advancement of the prosperity of Israel, and his reformation of the state of religion. With these events are recorded the grievous sins he committed, and the domestic as well as public calamities with which he was chastised. We here meet with many things worthy of imitation, and many that are recorded for our warning. The bias of man's fallen nature to sin, and the efficacy of Divine grace in renewing the soul to repentance and holiness, are therein illustrated. The history of king David is given in scripture with great simplicity and impartiality, and from it he appears, to those who fairly balance his many virtues and excellent qualities against his faults, to have been a great and good man.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1—10. *An amalekite brings tidings to David of the death of Saul.*

DAVID and his men had returned to Ziklag, when news was brought of the death of Saul. The decisive blow which opened David's way to the throne was given about the time he had been so distressed. He seems not to have made any inquiry after the event of the war, though he had so many reasons to be anxious about it. Those who commit their concerns to the Lord, will quietly abide his will. It shows that he desired not Saul's woful day, nor was impatient to come to the throne. The account the amalekite gave of the death of Saul is very particular, but from what is recorded in the last chapter of the preceding book, we may conclude that he feigned many circumstances. Happening to pass the field of battle, and finding Saul's body, he brought away his crown and bracelet. He formed his story in that manner which he thought would best procure David's favour, of whom he judged according to the selfishness of his own disposition.

Ver. 11—16. *The amalekite, accusing himself of having slain Saul, is put to death.*

David mourned and fasted, not only for his people Israel, and Jonathan his friend, but for Saul his enemy. This he did, not only as a man of honour, in observance of decorum, but as a good man and a man of conscience, who had forgiven the injuries Saul had done him, Prov. 24. 17, 18. By this it appears, that those passages in David's psalms, which express his desire of, and triumph in the ruin of his enemies, proceed not from a spirit of revenge, or any irregular passion. He was sincere in his mourning for Saul, and all with him rent their

clothes, and they fasted till even; they humbled themselves under the hand of God, and prayed for the repairing of the breaches made upon Israel by this defeat.

The man who brought the tidings, David put to death as a murderer of his prince. David herein did not do unjustly; for, 1. The man was an amalekite. That nation, and all that belonged to it, were doomed to destruction. 2. He himself confessed the crime. If he did as he said, he deserved to die for treason: and his lying to David, if indeed it were a lie, was highly criminal, and proved, as sooner or later that sin will prove, lying against his own head. Thus David did honourably and well. Hereby he demonstrated the sincerity of his grief; discouraged all others from thinking, by doing the like, to ingratiate themselves with him; and showed himself zealous for public justice, without regard to his own private interest. We may learn from it, that to give assistance to any in murdering themselves, directly, or indirectly, if done knowingly, incurs the guilt of blood; and the lives of princes ought to be, in a special manner, precious to all their subjects.

Ver. 17—27. *David's lamentation for Saul and Jonathan.*

Kasheth, or the bow, probably was the title of this mournful or funeral song; so called in the oriental style because Saul's death was occasioned by that weapon, and because the bow of Jonathan, 1 Sam. 20. 36, is celebrated in this song.—(30.)

This elegy bespeaks David to be a man of an excellent spirit. He was very generous to Saul, his sworn enemy. He conceals his faults; though there was no preventing their appearance in history, yet they should not appear in this elegy. We ought to deny ourselves the satisfac-

tion of making personal reflections upon those who have been injurious to us, much more drawing their character as if every man must of necessity be a bad man, who has done ill to us.

David celebrates what was praise-worthy in Saul. He does not commend him for what he was not; says nothing of his piety or fidelity; the funeral commendations, which are gathered out of the spoils of truth, are not at all to the praise of those on whom they are bestowed; but very much to the dispraise of those who unjustly misplace them. Ver. 23 may be understood of the harmony and affection, that, for the most part, subsisted between Saul and Jonathan; they were lovely and pleasant one to another. Jonathan was a dutiful son, Saul an affectionate father, therefore dear to each other in their lives; and in their death they were not divided, but kept close together in the stand they made against the philistines, and fell together in the same cause.

David had reason to say, that Jonathan's love to him was wonderful; sure never was the like, for a man to love one who, as he knew, was to take the crown over his head; and to be so faithful to his rival, far surpassed the highest degree of conjugal affection and constancy. Next to the love which subsists between Christ and his people, that endeared affection which springs from it, produces the strongest and most disinterested friendship. He was deeply concerned for the honour of God. Good men are touched very sensibly by the reproaches of those who reproach God. He was deeply concerned for the public welfare. Public losses are laid to heart by men of public spirit. David hoped God would make him instrumental to repair those losses, and yet laments them. The calamities of the Lord's people, and the triumphs of his enemies, will always grieve the hearts of true believers, whatever advantages they may obtain by them. Let us learn to manifest love to our country, zeal for the glory of God, and for the interests of true religion.

The expressions in this elegy are exceedingly beautiful. Observe, ver. 21, how the fruitfulness of the earth depends upon heaven. The worst thing David could wish to the mountains of Gilboa, was, barrenness, and unprofitableness to man. Those are miserable, that are use-

less; it was the curse Christ pronounced on the fig-tree. When David wished the mountains barren, he wished there might be no rain upon them: and if the heavens are brass, the earth will soon be iron. The fruitfulness of the earth must be devoted to heaven; which is intimated in his calling the fruitful fields, fields of offerings. Those fruits of their land that were offered to God were the crown and glory of it.

21. Or, The shield of Saul, the weapons of the anointed with oil.—See *Delany*.

26. It appears that there was somewhat in the conduct of Michal, David's wife, in too hastily consenting to be married to Phaltiel, that gave occasion to this comparison.—Her consenting to a divorce, though by her father's orders, showed want of affection and fidelity to David. The brother's love to him, as a friend, was more generous and constant than the sister's though a wife.—*Chandler*.

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1—7. *David made king in Hebron.*

Here we have an account of a civil war in Israel, which, in process of time, ended in the complete settlement of David on the throne. After the death of Saul, many israelites resorted to David at Ziklag, till his forces were very considerable, 1 Chron. 12. 22, but he did not take any step to obtain possession of the vacant throne, without consulting the Lord. He trusted in God who had promised him the kingdom, to give it in his own time and manner. He that believeth does not make haste, but waits God's time for the accomplishment of God's promises. He doubted not of success, yet he uses proper means, both divine and human. Assurance of hope in God's promise, will be so far from slackening, that it will quicken pious endeavours. If I be elected to the crown of life, it does not follow, Then I will do nothing; but, Then I will do all that God directs me, and follow his conduct who chose me: this good use David made of his election, and so will all whom God has chosen. David, according to the precept, acknowledged God in his ways. He inquired of the Lord. We must apply ourselves to God, not only when in distress, but even when the world smiles upon us, and second causes work in our favour.

In all our motions and removes, it is comfortable to see God going before us; and we may do so, if by faith and prayer we set Him before us. God, according to the promise, directed David's path, bade

him go up, told him whither, unto Hebron, a priest's city, one of the cities of refuge; so it was to David, and an intimation, that God himself would be to him a sanctuary.

David took his wives with him. He took his friends and followers with him. They had accompanied him in his wanderings, and when he gained a settlement, they settled with him. Thus, if we suffer with Christ, we shall reign with him, 2 Tim. 2. 12. But Christ does more for his good soldiers than David could do for his; to those who continue with Christ in his temptations, he appoints a kingdom, Luke 22. 29, 30. The tribe of Judah had often stood by itself, more than any other of the tribes; they did so now; yet they did not pretend to anoint David king over all Israel, (as Judg. 9. 22,) but only over the house of Judah. David rose gradually; thus the kingdom of the Messiah, the Son of David, is set up by degrees; he is Lord of all, by Divine designation, but we see not yet all things put under him, Heb. 2. 8. David still studies to honour the memory of his predecessor, and thereby to show, that he was far from aiming at the crown from any principle of ambition, or enmity to Saul, but only because he was called of God to it. He commended the men of Jabesh-gilead. He prays to God to bless them for their kindness to Saul, and to recompense it to them.

4. On the death of Saul the throne became vacant, and the people were at liberty, under the direction of God, to choose whom they pleased. The tribe of Judah unanimously chose David for their king, whom God had pointed out, and it is highly probable the whole body of the nation would have done the same, had they not been prevented by the influence of Abner. Ishbosheth reigned in every view by usurpation.—*Chandler.*

Ver. 8—17. *Abner makes Ishbosheth king—Battle between Abner's men, and those of Joab.*

The nation in general refused the person whom the Lord had selected for them, and preferred the surviving son of their rejected king, though in every respect an improper person. By this the Lord trained up his servant for future honour and usefulness; and the tendency of true godliness was manifested in his behaviour while passing through various difficulties. David was herein a type of Christ whom Israel would not submit to, though anointed of the Father to be a Prince and a Saviour to them.

Abner had learned of Saul, to make a

jest of wounds and death, and divert himself with scenes of blood and horror. He meant, Let the young men fight before us, when he said, Let them play before us: fools thus make a mock at sin. He is unworthy the name of a man, that can be prodigal of human blood, that can throw about firebrands, arrows, and death, and say, Am not I in sport? Prov. 26. 18, 19. The obstinacy of both sides was remembered in the name given to the place Helkath-hazzurim, the field of rocky men, men that were not only strong in body, but of firm and unshaken constancy. Poor honour for men to purchase at so vast an expense! They that lose their lives for Christ, shall find them. Ambitious men often consider war and the slaughter of their fellow-creatures as a mere diversion. From age to age numbers are ambitious of venturing their lives and their souls, for the empty hope of being celebrated as valiant, after they are dead, and from the same motive they shed the blood of their fellow-men.

Ver. 18—24. *Asahel slain by Abner.*

Death often comes upon us by ways that we least suspect. Who would fear the hand of a flying enemy, or the butt-end of a spear? yet from these Asahel receives his death's wound. And how often we are betrayed by the accomplishments we are proud of! Asahel's swiftness, which he presumed so much upon, did him no service, but forwarded his fate; with it he ran upon his death, instead of running from it. Abner's care how he should lift up his face to Joab, gives cause to suspect that he really believed David would have the kingdom at last, according to the Divine designation, and then, in opposing him, he acted against his conscience.

Ver. 25—32. *Both parties retreat.*

Now Abner appeals to Joab himself concerning the miserable consequences of a civil war. Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? They, who in their eagerness to engage, have made the lightest of such unnatural contests, will perceive in the event, that they are bitterness to all persons concerned. How easy it is for men to use reason, when it makes for them, who would not use it if it made against them! If Abner had been the conqueror, we should not have had him complain of the voraciousness of the sword, and the miseries of a civil war, nor pleading that both sides were

brethren; but, finding himself beaten, all these reasonings are improved for securing his retreat. See how the issue of things alters men's minds! The same thing which looked pleasant in the morning, at night looked dismal. Those who are forward to enter into contention, will repent it before they have done with it, and had better leave it off before it be meddled with, as Solomon advises. It is true of every sin—O that men would consider it in time!—that it will be bitterness in the latter end. At the last, it bites, like a serpent, those on whom it fawned.

Joab, though a conqueror, generously agreed to sound a retreat, knowing very well his master's mind, and how averse he was to the shedding of blood. He justly upbraids Abner with his forwardness to engage, and lays the blame upon him, that there had been so much bloodshed. Asahel's funeral is here mentioned; the rest they buried in the field of battle, but he was carried to Bethlehem, and buried in the sepulchre of his father. Thus are distinctions made between the dust of some and that of others; but in the resurrection no other difference will be made, but that between godly and ungodly, which will remain for ever.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1—6. *David's power increases—His family.*

It is not strange that there was war between Saul's house and David, but one would wonder there should be a long war, when David's house had right on its side, and therefore God on its side: but though truth and equity will triumph at last, God may, for wise and holy ends, prolong the conflict. The length of this war tried the faith and patience of David, and made his establishment at last the more welcome. The house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker, but the house of David grew stronger and stronger. The contest between grace and corruption in the hearts of believers, who are sanctified but in part, may fitly be compared to this warfare. There is a long war between them, the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; but as the work of sanctification is carried on, corruption, like the house of Saul, grows weaker and weaker; while grace, like the house of David, grows stronger and stronger, till

it comes to a perfect man, and judgment is brought forth unto victory.

Whatever were David's motives for multiplying his wives, it proved the occasion of much sin and trouble afterwards.

Ver. 7—21. *Abner offends Ishbosheth, and revolts to David.*

Abner began to grow weary of Ishbosheth's cause, and sought an opportunity to desert it. The crime charged upon him was considered as a claim to the kingdom of a deceased prince. Many are not above committing very base crimes who are too proud to bear reproof, or even the suspicion of being guilty. While men go on in sin, and apparently without concern, they often are conscious that they are fighting against God. Little confidence can be placed in those who affront their Maker, betray their country, or deceive those who confide in them, under the pretence of serving their friends. They mean to serve their own purposes; and will betray those who trust them when they can obtain any advantage. Yet the Lord subverts his own designs even by those who are actuated by revenge, ambition, or lust; but as they intend not to honour him, in the end they will be thrown aside with contempt.

There was real generosity both to Michal and to the memory of Saul, in David's receiving the former, remembering probably how once he owed his life to her affection, and knowing that she was separated from him partly by her father's authority. There was nothing in the sorrow of Phaltiel to show that her first husband had no right to reclaim her, or should relinquish his right.—(13.)

Let no man set his heart on that which he is not entitled to. If any disagreement has separated husband and wife, as they expect the blessing of God, let them be reconciled, and come together again; let all former quarrels be forgotten, and let them live together in love, according to God's holy ordinance.

Ver. 22—39. *Joab kills Abner—David mourns for him.*

The Lord was righteous in this. Abner had maliciously, and against the convictions of his conscience, opposed David; he had now basely deserted Ishbosheth, and betrayed him, under pretence of regard to God and Israel, but really from a principle of pride and revenge, and impatience of control. God will not use so bad a man, though David might, in so

good a work, as the uniting of Israel. Judgments are prepared for such scorers as Abner was. But it is as certain that Joab was unrighteous, and, in what he did, did wickedly. David laid this murder deeply to heart, and in many ways expressed his detestation. The guilt of blood brings a curse upon families: if men do not avenge it, God will. David himself attended the bier, and wept at the grave.

How much more we are beholden to God's providence, than to our own prudence, for the continuance of our lives and comforts. Were it not for the hold God has of the consciences of bad men, how soon would the weak and innocent become an easy prey to the strong and merciless, and the wisest die as fools! It is a sad thing to die like a fool, as they do that any way shorten their own days, and they that make no provision for another world.

On this occasion it is said, Whatever the king did, pleased all his people: which speaks his good affection to them; he studied to please them. Also their good opinion of him; they thought every thing he did, well done: such mutual willingness to please, and easiness to be pleased, will make every relation comfortable.

They were fully convinced that the king had no hand in Abner's murder, and it became him to give them the fullest assurances of it. Had they suspected that he either authorized or contrived it, in that critical juncture it might have ruined his affairs and caused a universal defection, as they could expect little good from his government, if he had caused Abner to be privately murdered while preparing to set him on the throne.—(13.)

David bewailed that he could not, with safety, do justice on the murderers. The sons of Zeruiah were too hard for him, too big for the law to take hold of. This is a diminution to David's greatness; he is anointed king, yet is kept in awe by his own subjects, and some of them are too hard for him. Who would be fond of power, when a man may have the name of it, and must be accountable for it, and yet is hampered in the use of it? Also to David's goodness; he ought to have done his duty, and trusted God with the issue. If the law had gone its course against Joab, perhaps the murder of Ishbosheth, Amnon, and others, had been prevented. Carnal policy spared Joab. Righteousness supports the throne, and

will never shake it. Yet it was only a reprieve that David gave to Joab; on his death-bed, he left it to Solomon to avenge the blood of Abner, who could better wield the sword of justice, because he had no occasion to draw the sword of war. Evil pursues sinners, and will overtake them at last. The Son of David long delays, but never fails to punish impenitent sinners. He who now reigns upon the throne of David has a kingdom of a nobler kind. Whatever he doeth is noticed by all his willing people, and is pleasing to them.

34. The hands and feet of malefactors were bound. By these expressions David means that Abner was not condemned by the course of justice.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1—7. *Ishbosheth murdered.*

Saul's house still grew weaker and weaker. As for Ishbosheth, all the strength he ever had was from Abner's support, and now that he was dead, there was no spirit left in him; he sees himself forsaken by his friends, and at the mercy of his enemies. All the israelites that adhered to him were troubled, and at a loss what to do. Mephibosheth, in the right of his father Jonathan, had a prior title, but his feet were lame, and he was unfit for any service.

See how Ishbosheth was murdered. When those difficulties dispirit us, which should rather invigorate us and sharpen our endeavours, we betray both our crowns and lives. Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty and ruin. The idle soul is an easy prey to the destroyer. We know not when and where death will meet us. When we lie down to sleep, we are not sure but that we may sleep the sleep of death before we awake; nor do we know from what unsuspected hand a stroke may come. Ishbosheth's own men, who should have protected his life, took it away!

6. The greek version is, "Now behold the door-keeper of his house had been cleaning wheat, and being heavy, had fallen asleep. So Rechab and Baana, the brothers, escaped notice, and went into the house," &c. The relation of Josephus is the same. It is customary in the east to give grain to soldiers in part of their pay, also for persons above the lowest ranks to take rest at noon.

Ver. 8—12. *David puts to death the murderers of Ishbosheth.*

A person may be glad to obtain his just wishes, and yet really regret the means by which he obtains them. He

may be sorry for the death of a person by which he is a gainer.—(13.)

These men mistook David's character. Many are conscious they should be pleased with villany which conduced to their profit, and are led to conclude that others will be so also. Whatever Ishbosheth's character was before God, he was righteous as to these men. They shed innocent blood, from the basest motives, and with circumstances of aggravation. David, as God's vicegerent, justly executed vengeance upon them. It had been well if he had been as decisive in the case of Joab.

David expressed himself resolutely, to prevent any intercession for the criminals by those about him; and thus piously intimates that his dependence was upon God for putting him in possession of the promised throne, and that he would not be beholden to any to help him, by indirect or unlawful practices. God had redeemed him from all adversity hitherto, helped him over many a difficulty, and through many a danger, therefore he would depend upon him to crown and complete his own work. He speaks of his redemption from all adversity, as a thing done; though he had many storms yet before him, he knew that He who had delivered, would deliver.

What confusion was this to the two murderers! What disappointment! And such they will meet with, who think to serve the interests of the Son of David, by any immoral practices, by war and persecution, fraud and rapine; who, under colour of religion, murder princes, break solemn contracts, lay countries waste, hate their brethren, and cast them out, and say, Let the Lord be glorified; kill them, and think they do God good service. However men may approve such methods of serving what they call the church and the catholic cause, Christ will let them know, another day, that christianity was not intended to destroy humanity; and they who thus think to merit heaven, shall not escape the damnation of hell.

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1—5. *David king over all Israel.*

Though David might by no means approve the murder of Ishbosheth, yet he might improve the advantages he gained thereby, and accept the applications made

to him thereupon. Judah had submitted to David as their king above seven years ago, and their ease and happiness, under his administration, encouraged the rest of the tribes to come to him. They plead their relation to him. Those who take Christ for their King, may thus plead with him, "We are thy bone and thy flesh; thou hast made thyself in all things like unto thy brethren, Heb. 2. 17, therefore be thou our Ruler, and let this ruin be under thy hand," Isa. 3. 6. His former good services to the public were a further inducement. Good offices done for us should be gratefully remembered by us, when there is occasion. But the Divine appointment was the greatest inducement of all. The Lord said, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, that is, thou shalt rule them; for princes are to feed their people as shepherds, in every thing consulting the subjects' benefit. Hereupon David was, the third time, anointed king. His advances were gradual, that his faith might be tried, and that he might gain experience. Thus his kingdom typified that of the Messiah, which was to come to its height by degrees; for we see not yet all things put under him, Heb. 2. 8, but we shall see it, 1 Cor. 15. 25. Thus Jesus became our Brother, took upon him our nature, inhabited it that he might become our Prince and Saviour: thus the humbled sinner takes encouragement from the endearing relation, applies for his salvation, submits to his authority, and craves his protection.

(*Read 2 Chron. 12. 23—40.*)

Ver. 6—10. *David takes the strong-hold of Zion.*

The first exploit of David, after he was anointed king over all Israel, was, to gain Jerusalem out of the hand of the jebusites, which, because it belonged to Benjamin, he could not well attempt, till that tribe, which long adhered to Saul's house, 1 Chron. 12. 29, submitted to him.

The jebusites confided either in the protection of their gods, which David, in contempt, had called the blind and the lame, for they have eyes and see not, feet and walk not; or in the strength of their fortifications, which they thought were so impregnable by nature or art, or both, that the blind and the lame were sufficient to defend them against the most powerful assailant. The strong-hold of Zion they especially depended on as what could not be forced. The enemies of God's people are often very confident of

their own strength, and most secure then when their day to fall draws nigh. But, their pride and insolence, instead of daunting him, animated David, and when he made a general assault, he gave this order to his men; He that smiteth the jebusites, let him also throw down in the ditch, or gutter, the lame and the blind, which are set upon the wall to affront us and our God; it is probable they had spoken blasphemous things, and were therefore hated of David's soul. Thus ver. 8 may be read: see 1 Chron. 11. 6, which speaks of smiting the jebusites, but nothing of the blind and the lame.

David fixed his royal seat in Zion; he dwelt in the fort, and built houses round about for his attendance and guards, from Millo, the state-house, and inward. He proceeded, and prospered in all he set his hand to, grew great in honour, strength, and wealth; more and more honourable in the eyes of his subjects, and formidable in those of his enemies; the Lord God of hosts was with him. Thus in the day of God's power, Satan's strong-hold, the human heart, is converted into a habitation of God, through the Spirit, and into a throne on which the Son of David rules and brings every thought into obedience to himself. May He thus come, and claim, and cleanse each of our hearts; and having destroyed every idol, may he reign therein for ever. And they who depend upon the Lord, and act according to his directions, will prevail against all enemies, and at length be admitted into his presence, to see and adore their before invisible Helper.

8. This verse has been variously rendered. *Kennicott* translates it thus: "Whosoever first smiteth the jebusites, and through the subterraneous passage reacheth the lame and blind, that are hated of David's soul, (because the blind and the lame continued to say, He shall not come into this house,) shall be head and captain. So Joab the son of Zeruiah went up first, and was appointed head." Many instances are recorded in history of fortresses being surprised through aqueducts, or subterraneous passages.

9. Millo is supposed to have been a sort of citadel in Jerusalem.

Ver. 11—16. *David's kingdom established.*

Hiram's workman built David a house to please him. Many have excelled in arts and sciences, who were strangers to the covenants of promise; yet David's house was not the worse, nor the less fit to be dedicated to God, for being built by the sons of the stranger. It is prophesied of the gospel church, The sons of strangers

shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee, Isa. 60. 10.

David's government was rooted and built up. He that made him king, established him, because he was to be a type of Christ, with whom God's hand should be established, and his covenant stand fast, Psa. 89. 21—28. Saul was made king, but not established; so Adam in innocency. David was established king, so is the Son of David, and all who, through him, are made to our God kings and priests. David's kingdom was exalted in the eyes both of its friends and enemies. Never had the nation of Israel appeared so great as it began now to be. Thus it is promised of Christ, that he shall be higher than the kings of the earth, Psa. 89. 27. God has highly exalted him, Phil. 2. 9. David perceived it by the wonderful concurrence of providences to his establishment and advancement. By this I know that thou favourest me, Psa. 41. 11. Many have the favour and love of God, and do not perceive it, and so want the comfort of it; but to be exalted to that, and established in it, and to perceive it, is happiness enough. He owned it was for his people Israel's sake, that God had done great things for him; that he might be a blessing to them, and they might be happy under his administration. God did not make Israel subjects for David's sake, that he might be great, and rich, and absolute; but made him their king for their sake, that he might lead, guide, and protect them. Kings are ministers of God to their people for good, Rom. 13. 4. Here is an account of David's family. He took more concubines and wives, ver. 13. Shall we praise him for this? We praise him not; we justify him not.

It may have been the effect of a desire to make his house sure, but it must be owned of too worldly an intention, to bring the promises of God in his favour to a full accomplishment, and polygamy was not then, as now, understood to be forbidden by God.—(19.)

Ver. 17—25. *David defeats the philistines.*

The particular service for which David was raised up, was to save Israel out of the hand of the philistines, ch. 3. 18. This Divine Providence, in the first place, gives him an opportunity of accomplishing. The philistines were the aggressors. They considered not that David had the presence of God with him, which Saul

had forfeited and lost. The kingdom of the Messiah, as soon as it was set up in the world, was thus vigorously attacked by the powers of darkness, who, with the combined force of jews and gentiles, made head against it. The heathen raged, and the kings of the earth set themselves to oppose it; but all in vain, Psa. 2. 1, &c. The destruction will turn, as this did, upon Satan's own kingdom. They took counsel together, but were broken in pieces, Isa. 8. 9, 10. They came up yet again. Jerusalem, from its infancy, has been aimed at, and struck at, with particular enmity. Their spreading themselves intimates that they were very numerous. The church's enemies, the further they spread themselves, the fairer mark they are to God's arrows.

David entered not upon action till he had inquired of the Lord. His conscience asked, Shall I go up? His prudence asked, Wilt thou deliver them into my hand? Hereby he owns dependence on God for victory; that he could not conquer unless God delivered them into his hand; and refers himself to the good pleasure of God, Wilt thou do it? Yea, says God, I will doubtless do it. If God send us, he will bear us out, and stand by us. The assurance God has given us of victory over our spiritual enemies, that he will tread Satan under our feet shortly, should animate us in our spiritual conflicts. We do not fight at uncertainty. David had now a great army at command, and in good heart, yet he relied more on God's promise than his own force.

In the former of these engagements, David routed the army of the philistines; and when he had done, he gave his God the glory. He hoped likewise that this breach was to let in a final desolation upon them; and, to perpetuate the remembrance of it, he called the place Baal-perazim, the master of the breaches, because, God having broken in upon their forces, he soon had the mastery of them. They brought the images of their gods into the field, as protectors, in imitation of the israelites bringing the ark into their camp. When the ark fell into the philistines' hands, it consumed them; but when these images fell into the hands of Israel, they could not save themselves from being consumed. In the latter of these engagements, God gave David sensible tokens of his presence. "And, by that sign, thou shalt know that the Lord

goes out before thee; though thou see him not, yet thou shalt hear him, and faith shall come and be confirmed by hearing." But though God promised to go before him and smite the philistines, yet David, when he heard the sound of the going, must bestir himself and be ready to pursue the victory. God's grace must quicken our endeavours. If God work in us both to will and to do, it does not follow that we must sit still, as those that have nothing to do, but we must therefore work out our salvation with all possible care and diligence, Phil. 2. 12, 13. The sound of the going was a signal to David when to move; it is comfortable to go out when God goes before us. And perhaps it was an alarm to the enemy, and put them into confusion. Hearing the march of an army against their front, they retreated with precipitation, and fell into David's army, which lay behind them in their rear. Of those whom God fights against, it is said, Lev. 26. 36, The sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them.

David observed his orders, waited till God moved, and stirred then, but not till then. Thus he was trained up in dependence on God and his providence. God performed his promise, went before him, and routed all the enemy's force, and David failed not to improve his advantages; he smote the philistines, even to the borders of their own country. When the kingdom of the Messiah was to be set up, the apostles, who were to beat down the devil's kingdom, must not attempt anything till they received the promise of the Spirit; who came with a sound from heaven, as of a rushing, mighty wind, Acts 2. 2.

(See 1 Chron. 14.)

CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1—5. *The ark removed from Kirjath-jearim.*

God is graciously present with the souls of his people, when they want the outward tokens of his presence. But now David is settled in the throne, the honour of the ark begins to revive. When we consider the ark was both the token of God's presence, and a type of Christ, we shall see that this history is very instructive. Because it had not been spoken of a great while, now it is spoken of, it is particularly described as the ark of the Lord who dwelleth upon the mercy-seat,

between the cherubim. The name and perfections of Jehovah are in Jesus, the true ark of the covenant, who forms the foundation of every true hope, and is the source of every believer's privileges and comforts; thus the Lord of hosts is his reconciled Friend, Father, and Protector. Whatever else may be overlooked, these truths should always be placed in the most convincing and conspicuous light in every religious ordinance, that sinners may be called upon to believe, and believers to rejoice in and glorify God our Saviour. Let us learn hence, 1. To think and speak highly of God. His name is above every name; the Lord of hosts, who has all the creatures in heaven and earth at his command, and receives homage from all; yet is pleased to dwell between the cherubim, over the propitiatory or mercy-seat, graciously manifesting himself to his people, reconciled in a Mediator, and ready to do them good. 2. To think and speak honourably of holy ordinances, which are to us as the ark was to Israel, the tokens of God's presence, Matt. 28. 20, and the means of our communion with him, Psalms. 27. 4. Christ is our Ark; in and by him God manifests his favour, communicates his grace to us, and accepts our adorations and addresses. The ark especially typified Christ and his mediation, in which the name of Jehovah and all his glorious excellences are displayed.

They were guilty of an error that they carried the ark in a carriage, whereas the priests should have carried it upon their shoulders. It was no excuse that the philistines had done so, and were not punished for it; they knew no better, nor had they priests or levites to undertake the carrying of it. Philistines may carry the ark in a cart with impunity; but if israelites do so, it is at their peril; it was not what God appointed.

2. Or to Baale—that is another name for Kirjath-jearim; see 1 Chron. 13. 6.

5. Or rather, with all their might and with songs, see 1 Chron. 13. 8.

Ver. 6—11. *Uzzah smitten for touching the ark—Obed-edom blessed.*

Uzzah was struck dead for touching the ark; his long familiarity with the ark, and the constant attendance he had given, might occasion presumption, but would not excuse it. God saw the presumption and irreverence of Uzzah's heart. Perhaps he affected to show, be-

fore this great assembly, how bold he could make with the ark. Familiarity, even with that which is most awful, is apt to breed contempt. Men frequently, by office, or by habit, are conversant about the most important truths or religious observances with a carnal mind, till they grow proud of their formal exercises, and presumptuously thrust themselves forward in services that do not belong to them. God hereby struck awe upon the thousands of Israel; thus he would teach them to rejoice with trembling, and always to treat holy things with reverence and holy fear. God would hereby teach us that a good intention will not justify a bad action; it will not suffice to say of that which is ill done, that it was well meant. He will let us know that he can and will secure his ark, and needs not any man's sin to help him to do it. If it were so great a crime for one to lay hold on the ark of the covenant who had no right to do so, what is it for those to lay claim to the privileges of the covenant, that come not up to the terms of it? To the wicked God says, What hast thou to do to take my covenant in thy mouth? Psalms. 50. 16. Friend, how camest thou in hither? If the ark was so sacred, and not to be touched irreverently, what is the blood of the covenant? Heb. 10. 29.

David's feelings on the infliction of this stroke were keen, and perhaps not altogether as they should have been. He seems to have been possessed with some measure of self-preference or self-complacency on account of his service. He had not examined the law of God, how this good work ought to have been performed. When matters turned out contrary to his expectations, he was disconcerted, and hard thoughts of God succeeded to his zeal, hope, and joy. Obed-edom knew what slaughter the ark had made among the philistines that imprisoned it, and the bethshemites that looked into it. He saw Uzzah struck dead for touching it, and perceived that David himself was afraid of meddling with it; yet he opened his doors without fear, knowing the ark was a savour of death unto death, to those only that treated it ill. "Oh the courage," says bishop Hall, "of an honest and faithful heart; nothing can make God otherwise than amiable to his own; even his very justice is lovely." The same hand that punished Uzzah's proud presumption, rewarded Obed-

edom's humble boldness, and made the ark to him a savour of life unto life: Let none think the worse of the gospel for the judgments inflicted on those that reject it, but consider on the other hand the blessings it brings to those that duly receive it. None ever had, or ever shall have reason to say, that it is in vain to serve God. Let masters of families be encouraged to keep up religion in their families, and to serve God and the interests of his kingdom with their houses and estates, for that is the way to bring a blessing upon all they have. The ark is a guest by which none shall lose who bid it welcome. Piety is the best friend to prosperity. In wisdom's left hand are riches and honour. Obed-edom's household shared the blessing: it is good to live in a family that entertains the ark, for all about it will fare the better.

Ver. 12—19. *David brings the ark into the city of Zion.*

The blessing with which the house of Obed-edom was blessed for the ark's sake, was a great inducement to David to bring it forward. It was evidence that God was reconciled and his anger turned away. It was evidence that happy was the man who had the ark near him. Christ is indeed a Stone of stumbling, and a Rock of offence, to them that are disobedient; but to them which believe, he is a Corner-stone, elect, precious, 1 Pet. 2. 6—8. The experience others have had of the gains of godliness, should encourage us to be religious. Is the ark a blessing to others' houses, let us bid it welcome to ours; we may have it, and the blessing of it, without fetching it away from our neighbours.

David rectified the former errors. We make good use of the judgments of God, when we are awakened by them to reform and amend what has been amiss. At first setting out, he offered sacrifices to God. We are likely to speed in our enterprises, when we begin with God, and give diligence to make our peace with him. When we attend on God in holy ordinances, we must look to the great Sacrifice, to which we owe that we are taken into covenant and communion with God, Psal. 50. 5. And we are so unworthy, and our services are so defiled, that all our joy in God must be connected with repentance and faith in the Redeemer's atoning blood. David himself attended the solemnity with the highest expressions of joy. We should

perform all religious services as intent upon them, and desiring to do them in the best manner. We ought to serve God with our whole body and soul, and with every endowment and capacity we possess.

On this occasion David laid aside his imperial purple, and put on a plain linen ephod, used in religious exercises even by those who were not priests, for Samuel wore one, 1 Sam. 2. 18. The tabernacle was not removed to Jerusalem; but David prepared another tent for the reception of the ark, where an altar was erected and sacrifices offered. This was intended for a temporary accommodation. David prayed with and for the people, and as a prophet, solemnly blessed them in the name of the Lord. Afterwards he distributed of the flesh of the peace-offerings, sacrificed at his expense, a sufficiency to every one present, with bread and wine in proportion. This he did in token of his joy and gratitude to God. When the heart is enlarged in cheerfulness, that should open the hand in liberality. As those to whom God is merciful, ought to show mercy in forgiving; so those to whom God is bountiful, ought to exercise bounty in giving.

Psalm 68. appears to have been composed for, and used at this solemn removal of the ark.

Ver. 20-23. *Michal's ill-conduct on this occasion.*

David, having dismissed the congregation with a blessing, returned to bless his household, to pray with them, and for them, and to offer up family thanksgiving for this national mercy. Ministers must not think that public performances will excuse them from family worship; but when they have with their instructions and prayers, blessed the solemn assemblies, they must return in the same manner to bless their households, for with them they are in a particular manner charged. David, though he had prophets, and priests, and levites, about him, yet did not devolve the work upon them, but himself blessed his household. It is angels' work to worship God, surely that can be no disparagement to the greatest of men.

Never did David return to his house with so much pleasure and satisfaction; yet this joyful day concluded with some uneasiness. Even the palaces of princes are not exempt from domestic troubles. Michal thought this zeal of David for the ark of God, and the transport of joy he

was in, upon its coming home to him, was foolish, and unbecoming so great a soldier, and statesman, and monarch: it had been enough for him to encourage the devotion of others, but she looked upon it as below him to appear so devout himself. The exercises of religion appear mean in the eyes of those that have little or no religion themselves. David, no doubt, observed decorum, and governed his zeal with discretion; but it is common for those who reproach religion, to put false colours upon it, and give it the most odious characters. Observe how he replied to her reproach. He does not upbraid her with her departure from him. He had forgiven that, and therefore had forgotten it, though, it may be, his own conscience, on this occasion, upbraided him with his folly in receiving her again; but he justifies himself in what he did. He designed thereby to honour God. Whatever construction she put upon it, he had the testimony of his conscience, that he sincerely aimed at the glory of God. He intimated that it was for want of this zeal her father was rejected. 1. We should be afraid to censure the devotion of others, though it may not agree with our sentiments, because, for aught that we know, the heart may be upright, and who should despise those whom God has accepted? 2. If we can approve ourselves to God in what we do in religion, and do it as before the Lord, we need not value the censures and reproaches of men. If we appear right in God's eyes, no matter how mean we appear in the eyes of the world. 3. The more we are vilified for well-doing, the more resolute we should be in it, and hold our religion the faster, and bind it the closer to us, for the endeavours of Satan's agents to shake us, and to shame us out of it.

In acts of devotion David laid aside the thoughts of majesty, humbled himself to the dust before the Lord, joined in with the meanest services done in honour of the ark, and yet thought it no diminution to him. The greatest of men is less than the least of the ordinances of Jesus Christ. He doubted not but even this would turn to his reputation. Let us never be driven from our duty by the fear of reproach, for to be steady and resolute in it, will, perhaps, turn to our reputation more than we think it will. Piety will have its praise: let us not be indifferent in it, nor afraid or ashamed to own it. David

was contented thus to justify himself, and did not further animadvert upon Michal's insolence; but God punished her, writing her childless from this time forward. Them that honour God, he will honour; but those that despise him, and his servants and service, shall be lightly esteemed. While we meekly rebuke opposers, the Lord will certainly plead our cause against them, and they who condemn great revivals in religion because not conducted just to their mind, often are punished by being excluded from so honourable a work. Finally, in the removal of the ark to the city of Zion, let us contemplate the Redeemer's ascension to glory, seek to participate his gifts, and to serve him with love and joy.

20. It is impossible to conceive a more glorious procession than this part of David's history presents to our view. David only divested himself of his royal dress. He was clothed with a double garment, a robe of fine linen and an ephod, so that it was impossible that any part of the body could be seen. Michal blamed his appearing in a dress she thought unworthy of the king, but which implied his reverence for God, and was convenient for the occasion.—*Chandler*.

(See 1 Chron. 15. 16.)

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1—3. *David's care for the ark.*

David being possessed of the kingdom, victorious over all his enemies, and at rest in his palace, considered how he might best employ his leisure and prosperity in the service of God. When he thought how stately his own house was, and how meanly the ark was lodged, he formed a design to build a magnificent temple for it. This he stated to Nathan, who, feeling assured that the design arose from zeal for the glory of God, encouraged David to proceed. This he did, not by revelation from God, but according to his private judgment as a godly man. We ought to do all we can, to encourage and promote the good purposes and designs of others, and as we have opportunity, to forward a good work. It was Christ's prerogative always to speak the mind of God, which he perfectly knew; other prophets spake it only when the Spirit of prophecy was upon them; but, if in any thing they mistook, as Samuel, 1 Sam. 16. 6, and Nathan here, God soon rectified the mistake.

Ver. 4—17. *God's covenant with David.*

We have here a full revelation of God's

favour to David, and the kind intentions of that favour. This message was sent without delay, that David might not remain under a mistake, or set his heart upon a work not intended for him. It was sent by Nathan; he was not discouraged by having his counsel contradicted by another prophet. It appears that Nathan spake more to David than is here recorded; for other reasons afterwards were given why David was not permitted to build the temple. Though the building of a temple accorded with the spirit of the mosaic dispensation, it was not commanded by any law, therefore was not peculiarly the duty of any one, without further intimation from God. As every man hath received the gift, so let him minister.

David is reminded of the great things God had done for him, though he had not the favour to be employed in this service. And a happy establishment is promised to God's Israel, ver. 10, 11. This comes in before the promises made to David himself, to let him understand, that what God designed to do, was for Israel's sake, that they might be happy under his administration. Blessings are promised to the family and posterity of David. Next to the happiness of our souls, and the church of God, we should desire the happiness of our seed, that those who come of us, may be praising God on earth, when we are praising him in heaven.

These promises relate to Solomon, David's immediate successor, and the royal line of Judah. The revolt of ten tribes from the house of David was their correction for iniquity, but the constant adherence of the other two to that family, perpetuated the mercy of God to the seed of David, according to this promise. No other family ever swayed the sceptre of Judah, than that of David. This is that covenant of royalty celebrated, Psal. 89. 3, &c. as typical of the covenant of redemption and grace. The promises also relate to Christ, who is often called David, and the Son of David: that Son of David to whom these promises pointed, and in whom they had their full accomplishment. He was of the seed of David, Acts 13. 23. To him God gave the throne of his father David, Luke 1. 32. All power, both in heaven and earth, and authority to execute judgment. He was to build the gospel temple, a house for

God's name, Zech. 6. 12, 13—the spiritual temple of true believers, to be a habitation of God, through the Spirit. That promise, I will be his Father, and he shall be my Son, is expressly applied to Christ by the apostle, Heb. 1. 5. The establishing of his house, and his throne, and his kingdom for ever, can be applied to no other than to Christ and his kingdom: David's house and kingdom long since came to an end; it is only the Messiah's kingdom that is everlasting, and of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end. The supposition of committing iniquity cannot be applied to the Messiah himself, but it is applicable to his spiritual seed; true believers have infirmities, for which they may expect to be corrected, but they shall not be cast off. Every transgression in the covenant will not throw us out of covenant. This message Nathan faithfully delivered to David; though, in forbidding him to build the temple, he contradicted his own words, yet he was not backward to do it, when he was better informed concerning the mind of God.

Ver. 18—29. *David's prayer and thanksgiving.*

David made a solemn address to God, in answer to the gracious message God sent him. When ministers deliver God's message to us, it is not to them, but to God that our hearts must reply; he understands the language of the heart, and to him we may come boldly. David had no sooner received the message, than while the impressions of it were fresh, he retired to return an answer. He went in before the Lord, that is, into the tabernacle where the ark was, which was the token of God's presence; before that he presented himself. God's will now is, that men pray every where; but wherever we pray, we must place ourselves as before the Lord, and him before us. David sat before the Lord. The Jews say, It was allowed to the kings of the house of David to sit in the temple, but to no others. This by no means justifies the ordinary use of that gesture in prayer. David went in and continued before the Lord, so it may be read; stayed some time silently meditating, before he began his prayer, and then remained longer than usual in the tabernacle. Or it may denote the frame of his spirit at this time. He went in, and composed himself before the Lord; thus we should do in all our

approaches to God; O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed.

The prayer itself is full of the breathings of devout affection toward God. David speaks very humbly of himself, and his own merits. He had low thoughts of his personal merits, Who am I? A man not worth taking notice of. Also of the merits of his family. It very well becomes the greatest and best of men, even in the midst of the highest advancements, to have low and mean thoughts of themselves. For the greatest men are worms, the best are sinners, and those that are highest advanced, have nothing but what they have received. All our attainments must be looked upon as God's gifts. He speaks very highly and honourably of God's favours to him. God had done great things for him already, and yet, as if those had been nothing, he had promised to do much more. The present graces and comforts of the saints are invaluable gifts; yet, as if these were too little for God to bestow upon his children, he has spoken concerning them for a great while to come, even as far as eternity reaches. Considering what the character and condition of man is, we may be amazed that God should deal with him as he does. Man is a mean creature, unprofitable to God; guilty, and under a law of death and condemnation. But how unlike are God's dealings with man to this law of Adam! He is brought near to God, purchased at a high rate; taken into covenant and communion with God: could this ever have been thought of? Do men usually deal thus one with another? No, the way of our God is far above the manner of men. Though he be high he hath respect to the lowly; and is this the manner of men? Some read thus: And this is the law of man, the Lord Jehovah: that is, "This promise of one whose kingdom shall be established for ever, must be understood of one that is a man, and yet the Lord Jehovah, this must be the law of such a one." Beyond this there is nothing we can desire. What can I ask, or wish for more? The promise of Christ includes all; if that man, the Lord God, be ours, what more can we ask, or think of? Eph. 3. 20. The promises of the covenant of grace are framed by Him who knows us, therefore knows how to adapt them to every branch of our necessity. He knows us better than we know our-

selves; therefore let us be satisfied with the provision he has made for us. What can we say more for ourselves in our prayers, than God has said for us in his promises?

David ascribes all to the free grace of God. Both the great things he had done for him, and the great things he had made known to him. All was for his word's sake, that is, for the sake of Christ the eternal Word; it is all owing to his merit. All that God does for his people in his providences, and secures to them in his promises, is for his pleasure, and for his praise, the pleasure of his will, and the praise of his word. He adores the greatness and glory of God. God's gracious condescension to David, and the honour put upon him, did not abate his awful veneration for the Divine Majesty. The nearer any are brought to God, the more they see of his glory; and the dearer we are in his eyes, the greater he should be in ours. We acknowledge concerning God, that there is no Being like him, nor any God beside him; and that which we have seen with our eyes, of his power and goodness, is according to all that we have heard with our ears, and the one half has not been told us. He expresses great esteem for the Israel of God, ver. 23, 24; considering the works God had done for them. God went to redeem them, applied himself to it as a great work, went about it with solemnity. As if there were the same consultation and concurrence of all the persons in the blessed Trinity, about the work of redemption, that there was about the work of creation, when God said, Let us make man. The redemption of Israel, as described here, was typical of our redemption by Christ, in that, 1. They were redeemed from the nations and their gods; so are we from all iniquity, and all conformity to this present world; Christ came to save his people from their sins. 2. They were redeemed to be a people unto God, purified and appropriated to himself, that he might make himself a great name, and do for them great things. The honour of God, and the eternal happiness of the saints, are the two things aimed at in their redemption. Also, The covenant God had made with them. It was mutual and immutable. He concludes with humble petitions to God. He grounds these upon the message God had sent him, ver. 27. Thy servant has

found in his heart to pray this prayer. Many, when they go to pray, have their hearts to seek, but David's heart was found, that is, it was fixed; gathered in from its wanderings, and entirely engaged to the duty, and employed in it. That prayer which is found in the tongue only, will not please God; it must be found in the heart; that must be lifted up and poured out before God. He builds his faith, and hopes to speed, upon the fidelity of God's promise. Thence he fetches the matter of his prayer, and refers himself to that, as the guide of his prayers.

David prays for the performance of the promise. Thus we must turn God's promises into prayers, then they shall be turned into performances: for, with God, saying and doing are not two things, as they often are with men; God will do as he hath said. He prays for the glorifying God's name. David desired the performance of God's promise for the honour, not of his own name, but of God's. Thus the Son of David prayed, Father, glorify thy name, John 12. 28; and ch. 17. 1. Glorify thy Son, that thy Son may also glorify thee. He prays for his house, to that the promise had special reference. The care of good men is very much concerning their families; and the best they can leave to their families is the blessing of God. The repetition of this request is not a vain repetition, but expresses the esteem he had of the Divine blessing, and his earnest desire of it, as all in all to the happiness of his family. He prays, 1. That the crown might remain in his family; that none of his might ever forfeit it, but that they might walk before God, and that would be their establishment. 2. That his kingdom might have its perfection and perpetuity in the kingdom of the Messiah. When Christ for ever sat down on the right hand of God, Heb. 10. 12, and received all assurance that his seed and throne shall be as the days of heaven, this prayer of David the son of Jesse for his seed was abundantly answered, that it might continue before God for ever: see Psa. 72. 17. The perpetuity of the Messiah's kingdom is the desire and faith of all good people.

The promises of God are not made to us personally, by name, as these to David, they belong to all who believe in Jesus Christ, and plead them in his name. As far as we are conscious that this is our desire, experience, and practice, we

may find in our hearts to make our requests as large as the largest of God's promises; we shall not meet a refusal. If the blessings we have already received are vast and unmerited, what shall we say to the future?—the eternal happiness God hath promised to his people, and the gift of his Son to be the ransom for our souls.

18. Kneeling so as to rest the body on the heels is the manner in which people in the east sit at this day before great men, and it is considered as a very humble posture.—*Pococke*.

19. See remarks on 1 Chron. 17.

23. "For you," or more correctly, "for them." (*Read 1 Chron. 17. with this chapter.*)

Psalms 2. 16. 22. 45. 114. 118. are considered as having reference to the prophecy by Nathan.)

CHAPTER VIII.

Ver. 1—8. *David subdues the philistines, the moabites, and the syrians.*

God had given David rest from all his enemies; and he, having made a good use of that rest, has now commission given him to make war to avenge Israel's quarrels and the recovery of their rights; for as yet they were not in full possession of that country, to which by the promise of God they were entitled.

He quite subdued the philistines, ver. 1. They had attacked him when they thought him weak, and were defeated then; but when he found himself strong, he attacked them, and made himself master of their country. They had long been vexatious and oppressive to Israel. And after the long and frequent struggles the saints have with the powers of darkness, like Israel with the philistines, the Son of David shall tread them all under feet, and make the saints more than conquerors.

He smote the moabites, and made them tributaries to Israel. He divided the country into three parts; two of which he destroyed, casting down the strongholds, and putting all to the sword; the third part he spared to till the ground, and be servants to Israel. The line that was to keep alive, though it was but one, is ordered to be a full line. Let the line of mercy be stretched to the utmost. Now Balaam's prophecy was fulfilled, A sceptre shall arise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, to the utmost of which the fatal line extended, Numb. 24. 17. The moabites continued tributaries to Israel till after the death of Ahab, 2 Kings 3. 4, 5; then they rebelled, and were never reduced.

He smote the syrians, or aramites, of whom there were two distinct kingdoms. The enemies of God's church, that think to secure themselves, will prove, in the end, to ruin themselves, by their confederacies with each other. Associate yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces, Isa. 8. 9. In all these wars David was protected, of which he often speaks in his psalms, giving the glory to God.

Ver. 9—14. *David dedicates the presents and the spoil unto the Lord.*

The spoils of the nations, and the rich things brought to him, David dedicated wholly to the Lord. All the precious things he was master of were dedicated things; they were designed for building the temple; and a good omen it was of kindness to the gentiles in the fulness of time, and of the making of God's house a house of prayer for all people, that the temple was built of the spoils and presents of gentile nations. Their gods of gold David destroyed, 2 Sam. 5. 21, but their vessels of gold he dedicated. Thus, in the conquest of a soul, by the grace of the Son of David, what stands in opposition to God must be destroyed, every lust mortified and crucified, but what may glorify him must be dedicated, and the property of it altered. Even the merchandise and the hire must be holiness to the Lord, Isa. 23. 18, the gain consecrated to the Lord of the whole earth, Mic. 4. 13, and then it is truly our own, and that most comfortably.

He got reputation, in particular, by his victory over the syrians and their allies the edomites, who acted in conjunction with them; yet he is careful to transfer the honour to God, as appears by the psalm he penned on this occasion. It is through God that we do valiantly. The edomites became David's servants. Now, and not till now, Isaac's blessing was accomplished, by which Jacob was made Esau's lord, Gen. 27. 37—40; and the edomites continued tributaries to the kings of Judah, as the moabites were to the kings of Israel, till, in Joram's time, they revolted, 2 Chron. 21. 8. Isaac foretold that Esau should in process of time break the yoke from off his neck.

David by these conquests secured peace to his son, that he might have time to build the temple; and procured wealth for his son, that he might have wherewith to build it. God employs his

servants variously; some in the spiritual battles, others in the spiritual buildings; and one prepares work for the other, that God may have the glory of all. All David's victories were typical of the success of the gospel against the kingdom of Satan, in which the Son of David rode forth, conquering and to conquer; and he shall reign, till he has brought down all opposing rule, principality, and power; and he has, as David had, a line to kill and a line to save; for the same gospel is to some a savour of life unto life, to others a savour of death unto death.

13. There are several districts to the east of Judea where the ground is covered with saline particles.

Ver. 15—18. *David's government and officers.*

David was not so engaged in his wars abroad as to neglect the administration of the government at home. He executed judgment unto all his people; neither did wrong, nor denied or delayed right to any. This speaks his industry and close application to business; also his easiness of access, and readiness to admit all addresses and appeals made to him. Also his impartiality, and the equity of his proceedings, in administering justice. He never perverted justice for favour or affection, nor had respect of persons in judgment. Herein he was a type of Christ, who was faithful and true, and who in righteousness both judges and makes war, Rev. 19. 11: see Psa. 72. 1, 2. To Him let us submit, his friendship let us seek, his service let us count our honour and our pleasure, diligently attending to the work he assigns to each of us. David kept good order and good officers in his court; he was the first king that had an established government. Let this remind us that our Lord Jesus has appointed officers in his kingdom for his honour and the good of the community; when he ascended on high, he gave these gifts, Eph. 4. 8, 11, to every man his work, Mark 13. 34. David made his sons chief rulers; but all believers, Christ's spiritual seed, are better preferred, for they are made to our God kings and priests, Rev. 1. 6.

18. The cherethites and pelethites were David's life-guard. Various opinions have been given concerning the origin of these names. The chaldees call them archers and slingers.

(See 1 Chron. 18.)

CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 1—8. *David sends for Mephibosheth.*

Amidst numerous affairs we are prone to forget the gratitude we owe, and the engagements we are under, not only to our friends, but to God himself. Yet persons of real godliness will have no rest till they have discharged them. David knew not that Jonathan had any child living; but to show his forgiveness of Saul's injuries, and his gratitude for Jonathan's kindness, he wished to confer favours on some of Saul's family, for the sake of his friend. The compendium Paul gives us of the life of David is, that he served his generation according to the will of God, Acts 13. 36: he was a man who made it his business to do good; witness this instance, where we may observe he sought opportunity to do good. The most proper objects of kindness and charity, frequently will not be met with without inquiry. The most necessitous generally are the least clamorous.

Jonathan was David's sworn friend, therefore he shows kindness to his son Mephibosheth. This teaches us to be mindful of our covenant. The kindness we have promised we must conscientiously perform, though it should not be claimed. God is faithful to us; let us not be unfaithful to one another. Also, to be mindful of our friendships, our old friendships. If Providence has raised us, and our friends and their families are brought low, we must not forget former acquaintance, but rather look upon that as giving us so much the fairer opportunity of being kind to them. Mephibosheth accepts this kindness with great humility and self-abasement. He was not one of those who take every favour as a debt, and think every thing too little that their friends do for them; but the contrary. It is good to have the heart humble under humbling providences. If, when Divine providence brings our condition down, Divine grace brings our spirits down with it, we shall be easy. And those who thus humble themselves shall be exalted.

Ver. 9—13. *David provides for Mephibosheth.*

This grant of his father's estate is confirmed to Mephibosheth, and Ziba called to be a witness. Saul had a good estate, his father was a man of substance, 1 Sam. 9. 1, and he had fields and vineyards to bestow, 1 Sam. 22. 7. Mephi-

bosheth is now master of it all. The management of the estate is committed to Ziba. But David will have Mephibosheth to his own table, and he is as well pleased with his post as Ziba with his. How unfaithful Ziba was to him we shall find afterwards. As David was a type of Christ, his Lord and Son, his Root and Offspring, let his kindness to Mephibosheth serve to illustrate the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward fallen man, to which he was under no obligation, as David was to Jonathan. Man was convicted of rebellion against God, and, like Saul's house, under a sentence of rejection from him; was not only brought low and impoverished, but lame and impotent, made so by the fall. The Son of God inquires after this degenerate race, that inquired not after him; comes to seek and to save them! To those who humble themselves before him, and commit themselves to him, he restores the forfeited inheritance; he entitles them to a better paradise than that which Adam lost, takes them into communion with himself, sets them with his children at his table, and feasts them with the dainties of heaven. Lord, what is man, that thou shouldst thus magnify him!

CHAPTER X.

Ver. 1—5. *David's messengers ill-treated by Hanun.*

Nahash had been an enemy to Israel, a cruel enemy, 1 Sam. 11. 2, yet had showed kindness to David. David therefore resolves gratefully to return it. If a pharisee gives alms in pride, though God will not reward it, yet he that receives the alms, ought to return thanks for it. God knows the heart, but we do not. But Hanun hearkened to the suggestions of his princes, who insinuated that David's ambassadors, under pretence of being comforters, were sent as spies, ver. 3. False men are ready to think others as false as themselves; and those who bear ill-will to their neighbours, are resolved not to believe that their neighbours bear any good-will to them. Ill-founded suspicion argues a bad mind. There is nothing so well meant, but it may be ill interpreted, and is wont to be so by men who love nobody but themselves. Men of the greatest honour and virtue must not think it strange if they are thus misrepresented. Charity thinketh

no evil. Entertaining this vile suggestion, Hanun basely abused David's ambassadors. According to the usages of those days and countries, he treated them in the most contemptuous manner. David showed concern for his servants. The jews wore their beards long, and it was not fit that persons of their rank should appear at court degraded; yet, in time, their beards would grow again, and all would be well. Let us learn not to lay unjust reproaches to heart; they will wear off, and turn only to the shame of their authors; while the injured reputation in a little time grows again, as these beards did. God will bring forth thy righteousness as the light, therefore wait patiently for him, Psa. 37. 6, 7.

Jesus Christ, the Son of David, sent his ambassadors, his apostles and ministers, after all his servants the prophets, to the jewish church and nation; but they treated them shamefully, as Hanun did David's ambassadors, mocked them, abused them, slew them; and this it was that filled the measure of their iniquity, and brought upon them ruin without remedy, Matt. 21. 35—41; 22. 7: compare 2 Chron. 36. 16; for Christ takes affronts and injuries done to his ministers as done to himself, and will avenge them accordingly. His ministers should neither fear nor be ashamed to execute their embassy of reconciliation, however they are despised, insulted, or persecuted. He will plead their cause, comfort them under trials, and reward their faithfulness with a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

4. In the eastern nations to have the beard cut off is a mark of extreme disgrace. Many would rather lose their lives than lose this appendage.

Ver. 6—14. *The ammonites defeated.*

The ammonites prepared for war. Thus sinners daringly provoke God, and expose themselves to his wrath, and never consider that he is stronger than they, 1 Cor. 10. 22. When David heard of their military preparations, he sent Joab to attack them. They that are at war with the Son of David, not only give the provocation, but begin the war. He waits to be gracious, but they strengthen themselves against him, and, if they turn not, he will whet his sword, Psa. 7. 12. God has forces to send against those that set his wrath at defiance, Isa. 5. 19, which will convince them that none ever hardened his heart against God, and prospered.

Joab prudently concerts with Abishai

his brother. Mutual helpfulness is brotherly duty. If occasion be, thou shalt help me, and I will help thee. Christ's soldiers should strengthen one another's hands in their spiritual warfare. The strong must succour and help the weak. They that through grace are conquerors over temptation, must counsel, and comfort, and pray for those that are tempted. When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren, Luke 22. 32. He bravely encourages himself, and his brother, and the rest of the officers and soldiers, to do their utmost. Let us be valiant, from a principle of love to Israel, that are our people, descended from the same stock, for whom we are employed, and in whose peace we shall have peace; and from a principle of love to God, for they are his cities that we are fighting in the defence of. The relation in which any person or thing stands to God, should endear it to us, and engage us to do our utmost in its service. He calmly leaves the issue with God. Let nothing be wanting in us, whatever the success be. Let God's work be done by us, and then God's will be done concerning us. When we make conscience of doing our duty, we may, with the greatest satisfaction, leave the event with God; not thinking that our valour binds him to prosper us, but that still he may do as he pleases, yet hoping for his salvation in his own way and time.

Joab provided for the worst, and put the case that the syrians or ammonites might prove too strong for him; but he proved too strong for them both. We do not hinder our success, by preparing for disappointment. It is the height of folly to awaken by insult and contempt the resentment of those whose power of taking vengeance cannot be diminished thereby. The fatal effects of such rash affronts are often severely felt.

Ver. 15—19. *The syrians defeated.*

Here is a new attempt of the syrians. Even the baffled cause will make head as long as there is any life in it; the enemies of the Son of David do so, Matt. 22. 34; Rev. 19. 19. The consequence of this victory over the syrians was, that the petty princes, who had been subject to Hadarezer, when they saw how powerful David was, very wisely made peace with Israel, with whom they found they could not make war, and served those who were able to give them protection. Thus the promise made to Abraham,

Gen. 15. 18, and repeated to Joshua, ch. 1. 4, that the borders of Israel should extend to the river Euphrates, was performed at length. Learn hence that it is dangerous to help those who have God against them; for when they fall, their helpers will fall with them.

Psalms 20. and 21. are supposed to have been composed on the occasion of these wars.

(See 1 Chron. 19.)

CHAPTER XI.

Ver. 1—5. *David's adultery with Bathsheba.*

God has shown unto all who duly attend unto his word, that every enormity dwells in every human heart; and that all are capable of committing crimes, if exposed to suitable temptations, and left to the natural tendency of their depraved affections. No situation or advantages have been found sufficient to extirpate the hateful propensities of the human heart. They have still lived, revived, and even for a season have seemed to reign with the most dreadful tyranny.

Observe the occasions of David's sin, which led to it. 1. Neglect of his business. When he should have been abroad with his army in the field, fighting the battles of the Lord, he devolved the care upon others, and he himself tarried still at Jerusalem. When we are out of the way of our duty, we are in temptation. 2. Love of ease, and the indulgence of a slothful temper. Idleness gives great advantage to the tempter. 3. A wandering eye. Either he had not, like Job, made a covenant with his eyes, or, at this time, he had forgotten it.

Observe the steps of the sin. See how the way of sin is down-hill; when men begin to do evil, they cannot soon stop themselves. The beginning of lust, as of strife, is like the letting forth of water; it is therefore wisdom to leave it off before it be meddled with. The foolish fly fires her wings, and fools away her life at last, by playing about the candle.

Observe the aggravations of the sin. David was a king, to whom God had intrusted the sword of justice, and the execution of the law upon other criminals, particularly upon adulterers, who were, by the law, to be put to death; for him, therefore, to be guilty of those crimes himself, was to make himself a pattern, when he should have been a terror to evil-doers. With what face could he rebuke or punish that in others, which he

was conscious to himself of being guilty of? see Rom. 2. 22. Much more might be said to aggravate the sin; and all that can be said on the other hand is, that it was by the surprise of a temptation that he was drawn into it. But by this instance we are taught what need we have to pray every day, Father, in heaven, lead us not into temptation, and to watch that we enter not into it.

1. "David sent Joab, &c. to destroy the amonites, at the return of the year, at the time when kings go forth to battle," that is, in the month of September; this month was appointed for making war, because, the great heats being passed, they then went into the field.—*T. H. Horne.*

4. *Delany* has examined the particulars recorded respecting Bathsheba, and does not consider her to have shown levity or licentiousness, nor to have been privy to her husband's death, but that she was an injured person.

Ver. 6—13. *David's contrivance to conceal his crime.*

Much more attention is required to conceal sin than would have sufficed to prevent it. The conscience once corrupted, feebly opposes fraudulent measures of preserving the reputation, or preventing the consequences of transgression. Every concession to sin hardens the heart, and provokes the departure of the Holy Spirit. Whether through a self-denying disposition, or whether any thing had excited his suspicions, Uriah would not go home, and thus the Lord defeated David's design of covering his transgression. It is very wicked, upon any design whatsoever, to make a person drunk; Woe to him that does so, Hab. 2. 15, 16. God will put into their hand a cup of trembling, who put into the hands of others the cup of drunkenness. Robbing a man of his reason, is worse than robbing him of his money; and drawing him into sin, worse than drawing him into any trouble whatsoever. Every good man, especially every magistrate, should endeavour to prevent this sin, by admonishing, restraining, and denying the glass to those whom they see falling into excess; but to further it, is to do the devil's work.

13. In Bengal, servants and others generally sleep in the verandah or porch in front of their master's house.—*Ward.* This is common in many parts of the east.

Ver. 14—27. *David causes Uriah to be slain.*

Adulteries have often occasioned murders, and one wickedness must be covered and secured with another. The beginnings of sin are therefore to be dreaded;

for who knows where they will end? Satan having drawn David on, had prepared his mind for more atrocious wickedness. He now perceived that if Uriah lived, what had passed must be discovered; to prevent this Uriah must die. A plausible and secret method of getting rid of him was suggested to David's mind. Joab and those who retired from Uriah were made accomplices in the murder; and those who were slain with him were no less murdered than he was. This was deliberate murder, exceedingly aggravated by the circumstances. When a man's obligations to the Lord are forgotten, no marvel if all the ties of justice, gratitude, and friendship to men are disregarded. If the heart and conscience be thus stupified, it is easy for the enemy to amuse with some cloak of iniquity, and induce the language of indifference or infidelity; or success in such a course may even be considered as a Divine sanction!

Can a real believer ever tread this path, and fall asleep in the arms of Satan? Can such a person be indeed a child of God, a member of Christ, and an heir of glory? Though grace be not lost in such an awful case, the assurance and consolation of it must be suspended. All his life, spirituality, and comfort in religion, we may be sure, was lost. No man in such a case can have evidence to conclude that he is a believer. The higher a man's confidence is, who hath sunk in wickedness, the greater the proof of his presumption and hypocrisy. Let not any one who resembles David in nothing but his transgressions, bolster up his confidence with this example. Let him follow David in his humiliation, repentance, and his other eminent graces, before he think himself only a backslider, and not a hypocrite.

Let no opposer of the truth say, These are the fruits of faith! No, they are the effects of corrupt nature. Let us then all watch against the beginnings of self-indulgence, and keep at the utmost distance from all evil. Let us beg of God to close our senses, imaginations, and desires to all forbidden objects. But with the Lord there is mercy and plenteous redemption. He will cast out no humble, penitent believer, nor will he suffer Satan to pluck his sheep out of his hand. Let those who are fallen return to the Lord without delay, seeking forgiveness through the Redeemer's atoning blood. Yet the

Lord will recover his people in such a way as will mark his abhorrence of their crimes, to deter all who regard his word from abusing the encouragements of his mercy.

Many have, through this fall of David, been prejudiced against true religion, hardened in infidelity, or imboldened to blasphemy; while others have committed habitual wickedness under a religious profession. But these have been either open enemies of religion, or hypocritical pretenders to it. The secret malignity of their hearts will be detected, and the Divine justice will be displayed in their condemnation. On the other hand, thousands, from age to age, by this awful example, have been rendered more suspicious of themselves, more watchful, more afraid of temptation, more dependent on the Lord, more fervent in prayer, and by David's fall have been kept from falling. None will be injured by it, except those who desire excuse for sin. No excuse can be made for David; he attempted none for himself. May we be unfeignedly thankful if we have been restrained from such falls; may we take warning, and commit our souls to Him who is able to keep us from falling.

The preceding chapter is an illustrious proof of the truth of the sacred writings. Who, that intended to deceive by trumping up a religion which he designed to father on the purity of God, would have inserted such an account of one of its most zealous advocates, and once its brightest ornament? God alone, whose character is impartiality, has done it, to show that his religion will ever stand, independent of the conduct of its professors.—(11.)

CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1—14. *Nathan's parable—David confesses his sin.*

Our falls are of ourselves, but our recoveries are from the Lord. He ordinarily makes use of the ministry of the word in bringing sinners to repentance. Nathan did not go of his own accord, and in his own name, to reprove David for his offences, but when sent by the Lord he plainly delivered his message. During this interval we may well suppose David's comforts and the exercises of his graces were suspended, and his communion with God interrupted; during all that time, for certainty, his soul was like a tree in winter, that has life in the root

only; therefore, after Nathan had been with him, he prays, Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and, Open thou my lips, Psa. 51. 12, 15.

Though God may suffer his people to fall into sin, he will not suffer them to lie still in it. "He went on frowardly in the way of his heart," and if left to himself, would wander endlessly, but, saith God, "I have seen his ways, and will heal him," Isa. 57. 17, 18. He sends after us before we seek after him, else we should certainly be lost. Nathan was the prophet by whom God had sent David notice of his kind intentions toward him, ch. 7. 4, and now, by the same prophet, he sends this message of wrath. God's word in the mouth of his ministers must be received, whether it speak terror or comfort. Nathan made use of a parable, which seemed to David as a complaint made by Nathan against one of his subjects who had wronged his poor neighbour. In this, he showed the evil of the sin David had been guilty of. The traveller or wayfaring man was, as bishop Patrick explains it from the Jewish writers, the imagination, disposition, or desire, which came into David's heart, which he might have satisfied with some of his own, yet nothing would serve but Uriah's darling. They observe, that this evil disposition is called a traveller, for in the beginning it is only so, but in time it becomes a guest, and, in conclusion, is master of the house. Yet, some observe, that in David's breast lust was but as a wayfaring man that tarrys only for a night; it did not constantly dwell and rule there.

By this parable Nathan drew from David a sentence against himself. For his injustice in taking away the lamb, he should restore four-fold, according to the law. For his tyranny and cruelty, and the pleasure he took in abusing a poor man, he should be put to death. If a rich man steal merely that he may be imperious and vexatious, he deserves to die; for to him restitution is no punishment, or next to none. If the sentence be thought too severe, it must be imputed to the present roughness of David's temper, being under guilt, and not having himself as yet received mercy.

Nathan closed with him by applying the parable. Great need there is of prudence in giving reproofs; it is well managed if, as here, the offender can be brought, ere he is aware, to convict and

condemn himself. In his application, he shows his faithfulness. In plain terms, "Thou art the man." Nathan now speaks, not as a petitioner for a poor man, but as an ambassador from the great God, with whom is no respect of persons. And who, by Nathan, reminded David of the great things he had done and designed for him. God's bounty to us is a great aggravation of our discontent. He charges him with high contempt of the Divine authority. This is the spring, and this is the malignity of sin, that it is making light of the Divine law, and the Law-maker. He despised the word of the Lord, so it is in the Hebrew, not only his commandment in general, which forbade such things, but the particular word of promise, which God had, by Nathan, sent to him some time before.

God had promised that his mercy should not depart from David and his house, ch. 7. 15, yet here threatens that the sword should not depart. Can the mercy and the sword consist with each other? Yes; those may lie under great and long afflictions, who shall not be excluded from the grace of the covenant. The reason given is, Because thou hast despised me. Those who despise the word and law of God, despise God himself, and shall be lightly esteemed. It is particularly threatened, that his children should be his grief. Sin brings trouble into a family, and one sin is often made the punishment of another. Also that his wives should be his shame. The sin was secret, and industriously concealed, but the punishment should be open, and industriously proclaimed. As face answers to face in a glass, so does the punishment often answer to the sin. Thus God would show how much he hates sin, even in his own people, and that, wherever he finds it, he will not let it go unpunished. But observe David's penitent confession of his sin, hereupon. He says not a word to excuse himself or extenuate his sin, but freely owns it. It is probable that he said more to this purport; but this is enough to show that he was truly humbled by what Nathan said, and submitted to the conviction. He owns his guilt, I have sinned; and aggravates it, It was against the Lord. See also the psalm he penned on this occasion, Psa. 51. 4. Against thee, thee only have I sinned.

When David said, I have sinned, and Nathan perceived that he was a true

penitent, in God's name he assured him his sin was forgiven. Thou shalt not die, that is, not die eternally, nor be for ever put away from God, as thou wouldest have been, if thou hadst not put away the sin. Thy iniquity shall not be thy everlasting ruin. Though thou shalt all thy days be chastened of the Lord, yet thou shalt not be condemned with the world. See how ready God is to forgive sin. To this instance, perhaps, David refers, *Psa.* 32. 5. I said, I will confess, and thou forgavest. Let not great sinners despair of finding mercy with God, if they truly repent; for who is a God like unto him, pardoning iniquity?

David had, by his sin, wronged God in his honour; he had given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. The wicked people of that generation, the infidels, idolaters, and profane, would triumph in David's fall, and speak ill of God and of his law, when they saw one guilty of such foul enormities, who professed such an honour both for him and it. They would say, Was not Saul rejected for a less matter? Why then must David live and reign still? Not considering that God sees not as man sees, but searches the heart. To this day, there are those who reproach God, and are hardened in sin, through the example of David. There is this great evil in the scandalous sins of those who profess religion, and relation to God, that they furnish the enemies of God and religion with matter for reproach and blasphemy, *Rom.* 2. 24. God will therefore vindicate his honour, by showing his displeasure against David for this sin, and letting the world see that though he loves David, he hates his sin. And by the temporal punishment of David in his family, the Lord silences these blasphemers. He began with the death of the child. This providence being predicted and publicly declared to be a rebuke for David's sin, would be for the time, a sharp and painful chastisement.

It appears from David's case, that even where reconciliation is obtained, the Lord will visit the transgression of his people with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. For one momentary gratification of a vile lust, David had to endure many days and years of extreme distress.—(60.)

13. Thou shalt not die. Though David should die a corporeal death, yet not by the immediate hand of God, or by the sword of justice as a malefactor, a murderer, or adulterer, as he, according to the law, deserved to die; nor should he

die a spiritual death, though his grace had been so low, and his corruption so high; nor an eternal death, the second death, the just wages of sin.—*Gill.*

Ver. 15—25. *The death of David's child—The birth of Solomon.*

David now penned the 51st Psalm, in which, though he had been assured that his sin was pardoned, he prays earnestly for pardon, and greatly laments his sin. True penitents will still be ashamed of what they have done, when God is pacified toward them, *Ezek.* 16. 63. He fasted, and lay all night upon the earth. This was evidence of the truth of his repentance. He was willing to bear the shame of his sin, to have it ever before him, to be continually upbraided with it. He was so far from desiring the death of the child, that he prayed earnestly for its life.

Observe David's calmness when he understood the child was dead. He went to acknowledge the hand of God in the affliction, and to humble himself under it, and to submit to his holy will in it; to thank God that he himself was spared, and his sin pardoned; and to pray that God would not proceed in his controversy with him, nor stir up all his wrath. Is any afflicted? Let him pray. Weeping must never hinder worshipping. God gives us leave to be earnest with him in prayer for particular blessings, from confidence in his power and general mercy, though we have no particular promise to build upon. We cannot be sure, yet let us pray, for who can tell but God will be gracious to us, in this or that particular? When relations and friends have fallen sick, the prayer of faith often has prevailed much; while there is life, there is hope, and while there is hope, there is room for prayer. But those who are ignorant of the divine life, cannot understand the believer's conduct. They will probably mistake deep humility and fervent prayer, for impatience and undue regard for created objects; while submission to the Lord's will, and cheerful gratitude under sharp trials, will be deemed indifference and apathy.

The consideration of our own death should moderate our sorrow at the death of our relations. It is the common lot; instead of mourning for their death we should think of our own; and though we lose them now, we shall die shortly, and go to them. Godly parents have great reason to believe concerning their children that die in infancy, that it is well

with their souls in another world; for the promise is to us and to our seed. This may comfort us when our children are removed by death; they are better provided for than they could be in this world.

Whilst David had hopes of prevailing, prayer was his duty; but after the event, submission to the Divine appointment was required. He could not profit the child, but he might injure himself and neglect his duty. The child, released from sufferings and gone before him to a better world, was no loser; there remained no cause for sorrow as to its removal, unless he would quarrel with the will of God. This he would not do, but rather prepared to follow, and hoped to meet him in the world above. Bathsheba, no doubt, was greatly afflicted with the sense of her sin and the tokens of God's displeasure. But both had reason to be comforted in the tokens of God's reconciliation to them. He gave them a son. They called him Solomon, or Peaceful, because his birth was a token of God's being at peace with them, because of the prosperity which was entailed upon him, and because he was to be a type of Christ, the Prince of peace.

David had patiently submitted to the will of God in the death of one child, and God made up the loss abundantly to his advantage, in the birth of another. The way to have creature comforts either continued or restored, or the loss made up some other way, is, cheerfully to resign them to God. God, by his grace, particularly owned and favoured that son, and ordered him to be called Jedidiah, Beloved of the Lord, though a seed of evil-doers; so well ordered was the covenant, signifying, that those who were by nature children of wrath and disobedience, should, by the covenant of grace, not only be reconciled, but made favourites. And, in this name, he typified Jesus Christ, that blessed Jedidiah, the Son of God's love, concerning whom God declared again and again, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Our prayers for our children are graciously and equally answered when some of them die in their infancy, (for they are well taken care of,) and others live "beloved of the Lord."

Ver. 26—31. *David's severity to the ammonites.*

We have here an account of the conquest of Rabbah, and other cities of the ammonites. Good reason had David to

own, that God dealt not with him according to his sins, Psa. 103. 10. Joab herein showed himself a faithful servant, that sought his master's honour, and his own only in subordination to his master's, and left an example to the servants of the Lord Jesus, in every thing they do to consult his honour: Not unto us, but to thy name, give glory. To be thus severe with all the cities of the children of Ammon was extremely rigorous, and a sign that David's heart was not yet made soft by repentance, else his compassion would not have been thus shut up; for it is most probable that this event took place before he had found mercy, else he would have been more ready to show mercy. But it is not certain what were the punishments inflicted upon these ammonites, whether David put them to death, or whether he condemned them to bondage in various labours. When we lose sight of the honour that cometh from God, we become ambitious and vain of worldly distinctions. We shall be most compassionate, kind, and forgiving to others, when we most feel our need of the Lord's forgiving love, and taste the sweetness of it in our own souls.

27. The conduit or reservoir of water was cut off, and the city so taken. Rabbah was afterwards taken by Antiochus in the same manner.—*Poole.*

30. In some eastern countries the royal crown is very large, and suspended or supported over the king's head, not placed upon it.

31. The hebrew word means *to*, and putting the people to saws, brick-kilns, &c. means no more than to employ them as slaves in the most menial and laborious offices.—*T. H. Horne.*

Psalms 6. 51. 32. 38. 39, 40. 41. 103. are supposed to have reference to the events recorded in this chapter.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ver. 1—20. *Amnon's violence to his sister.*

The righteous God told David, by Nathan the prophet, that, to chastise him for his sin, in the matter of Uriah, he would raise up evil against him out of his own house, ch. 12. 11. And here we find the evil beginning to rise; from henceforward he was followed with one trouble after another, which made the latter part of his reign less glorious and pleasant than the former part. Thus God chastened him with the rod of men, yet assured him that his loving-kindness he would not utterly take away. Adultery and murder were David's sins, those sins among his children were the beginnings of his punishment; and the more

grievous, because he had reason to fear that his bad example might help to bring them to these wickednesses.

The word of God by Nathan began to take effect soon after it was delivered, to mark the Divine abhorrence of David's crimes. He seems to have been too indulgent to his children. They would consider his conduct as a license to them. Parents know not how fatal the consequences may be, if, in any instance, they give their children bad examples. Thus David might trace the sins of his children to his own misconduct, which must have increased the anguish of the chastisement.

We may learn from this, both the malignity of sin—unbridled passions are as bad as unbridled appetites—and the mischievous consequences of sin; At last it bites like a serpent: for here we find that sins, even if sweet in the commission, afterward become odious and painful, and the sinner's own conscience makes them so to himself. Had Amnon hated the sin, and loathed himself for it, we might have hoped he was penitent; Godly sorrow worketh indignation, 2 Cor. 7. 10; but to hate the person he had abused, showed that his conscience was terrified, but his heart not at all humbled. See what deceitful pleasures those of the flesh are, how soon they pass away, and turn into loathing! Inordinate lust ever ends in discontentment.—(34.)

Let no one ever expect better treatment from those who are capable of attempting their seduction; but it is better to suffer the greatest wrong than to commit the least sin.

Ver. 21—29. *Absalom murders his brother Amnon.*

What Solomon says of the beginning of strife, is as true of the beginning of all sin, It is as the letting forth of water; when once the flood-gates are plucked up, an inundation follows; one mischief causes another, and it is hard to say what shall be in the end thereof. David ought to have punished his son Amnon for his crime, and to have put him to open shame; both as a father and as a king he had power to do it! The greek version here adds these words: But he saddened not the spirit of his son Amnon, because he loved him, because he was his first-born. David fell into Eli's error.

Absalom's hatred of his brother's crime had been commendable, and he might justly have prosecuted him for it by due

course of law; but to hate his person, and design his death by assassination, was to put a great affront upon God, by offering to repair the breach of his seventh commandment by the violation of his sixth, as if they were not both alike sacred. He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill, James 2. 11. To murder him, as he did, was to copy Cain's example; but Abel was slain for his righteousness, Amnon for his wickedness. Observe the aggravations of this sin: 1. He would have Amnon slain, when least fit to go out of the world; as if his malice aimed to destroy both soul and body. 2. He involved his servants in the guilt. Those servants are ill-taught who obey wicked masters in contradiction to God. 3. There is reason to suspect that Absalom did this, not only to revenge his sister's quarrel, but to make way for himself to the throne.

Indulged children will always prove crosses to godly parents, whose foolish love for them induces them to neglect their duty to God. Let all this be a warning to us to watch and pray against temptation, lest by the misconduct of one unguarded hour we occasion fatal consequences to our offspring, and misery to ourselves for all the rest of our lives.

Ver. 30—39. *David's grief—Absalom flees to Geshur.*

How wicked was Jonadab that he did not sooner make David acquainted with this plan! If we do not our utmost to prevent mischief, we make ourselves accessory to it. If we say, Behold, we knew it not; doth not He that pondereth the heart, consider whether we did or not? see Prov. 24. 11, 12. Jonadab was as guilty of Amnon's death, as of his sin, ver. 5; such false friends do they prove, who are hearkened to as counsellors to do wickedly. Absalom immediately fled; no part of the land of Israel could shelter him, the cities of refuge gave no protection to a wilful murderer. Though David had let Amnon's incest go unpunished, Absalom could not promise himself pardon for this murder; so express was the Divine law in such a case.

David mourned for Amnon a good while; but time too much wore off his detestation of Absalom's sin. Instead of loathing him as a murderer, he longs to go forth to him. At first he could not find in his heart to do justice on him; now he can almost find in his heart to take

him into his favour again. This was David's infirmity; something God saw in his heart that made a difference, else we should have thought that he, as much as Eli, honoured his sons more than God.

O God, thou art righteous to reckon for those sins which human partiality or negligence hath omitted; and while thou punishest sin with sin, to punish sin with death. Happy is the man, who, by unfeigned repentance, improves the days of his peace to the prevention of future vengeance—which, if it be not done, the hand of God shall as surely overtake us in judgment, as the hand of Satan hath overtaken us in miscarriage unto sin.—(34.)

CHAPTER XIV.

Ver. 1—20. *Joab's contrivance to procure Absalom's recall.*

Absalom had thrown himself out of his royal father's protection and favour, which left him an exile, outlawed and proscribed. Here we have the arts used to bring him and his father together again, and how it was done; which is here recorded to show the folly of David in sparing Absalom, and indulging him in his wickedness, for which he was, soon after, severely corrected by his unnatural rebellion. Joab framed a plausible story, and employed an ingenious woman in the character of a disconsolate widow to relate it to him. But the feigned case was very different from that which it assumed to represent. The state of David's mind rendered it unnecessary to be very exact; he did not require a good reason, but a plausible excuse, as Joab well knew. She purposely confounded the feigned cause of her son with that of Absalom, so that part of her address is very obscure.

We may, however, observe here, how she pleads God's mercy and his clemency toward poor guilty sinners. "God does not take away the soul, or life, but devises means that his banished, his children that have offended him, and are obnoxious to his justice, be not for ever expelled from him." Here are two great instances of the mercy of God to sinners, properly urged as reasons for showing mercy. 1. The patience he exercises toward them. His law is broken, yet he does not immediately take away the life of those that break it; does not strike sinners dead, as justly he might, in the

act of sin, but bears with them, and waits to be gracious. 2. The provision made for their restoration to his favour, that though by sin they have banished themselves from him, yet they might not be cast off for ever. Atonement might be made for sinners by sacrifice. Lepers, and others ceremonially unclean, were banished, but provision was made for their cleansing, that, though for a time excluded, they might not be finally expelled. The state of sinners is a state of banishment from God. Poor, banished sinners are likely to be for ever expelled from God, if some course is not taken to prevent it. He is not willing that any should perish. Infinite wisdom has devised proper means to prevent it; so that it is the sinner's own fault if he be cast off. This instance of God's good will towards us all should incline us to be merciful and compassionate one towards another, Matt. 18. 32, 33. But God pardons none to the dishonour of his law and justice; nor any who are impenitent, nor to the encouragement of crimes, or the injury of others.

Ver. 21—24. *Absalom recalled to Jerusalem.*

David was willing to think that his oath to spare the woman's supposed son obliged him to recall Absalom, who was the person really intended, though he must have perceived the insufficiency of her arguments and the disparity of the cases. He cannot be justified in suspending the execution of the law, Gen. 9. 6, Whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; in which a righteous magistrate ought not to acknowledge even his brethren, or know his own children. God's laws were never designed to be like cobwebs, which catch the little flies, but suffer the great ones to break through. God justly made Absalom a scourge to him, whom his foolish pity thus spared. But, though David allowed him to return to his own house, he forbade him the court, and would not see him himself. Perhaps he put him under this mark of his displeasure, that he might be awakened to a sight of his sin, and to sorrow for it.

David was inclined to favour Absalom, yet, for the honour of his justice, he could not do it but upon intercession made for him, which may illustrate the methods of Divine grace. It is true, God has thoughts of compassion toward poor sinners, not willing that any should perish; yet he is reconciled to them through

a Mediator, who intercedes with him on their behalf, and to whom he has given these orders, Go, bring them again. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and he came to this land of our banishment to bring us to God.

Ver. 25—27. *Absalom's person—His hair.*

Occasion is taken to give an account of Absalom. Nothing is said of his wisdom and piety. All here said of him is, 1. That he was a very handsome man; there was not his equal in all Israel for beauty. A poor commendation for a man that had nothing else in him valuable. Many a polluted, deformed soul dwells in a fair and comely body. 2. That he had a very fine head of hair. Something there was which made it very valuable, and very much an ornament to him. This notice is taken of his hair, not as the hair of a nazarite, but as the hair of a vain man. He let it grow till it was a burden to him, and was heavy on him, nor would he cut it as long as he could bear it; as pride feels no cold, so it feels no heat; and that which feeds and gratifies it, is not complained of though very uneasy. May the Lord grant us the inward beauty of holiness, and the adorning of a meek and quiet spirit, for favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; they only who fear the Lord are truly excellent and happy.

26. If the shekel here mentioned was what some authors call the king's shekel, Absalom's hair would weigh three pounds two ounces. It was customary to use much oil in dressing the hair, and even to powder it with gold dust. There may be a mistake in the numeral letter. We may however understand the passage as showing that Absalom had an uncommonly fine head of hair, of which eastern people are very proud. See *Harmer*.

Ver. 28—33. *Absalom, after two years, brought to his father's presence.*

Absalom's spirit was still unhumbled, his pride unmortified. Had he truly repented of his sin, his solitude and retirement would have been agreeable to him. If a murderer must live, yet let him be for ever a recluse. Absalom cannot do his father mischief till reconciled to him; this, therefore, is the first branch of his plot. He gained this point, not by pretended submissions and promises of reformation, but by insults and injuries! By his insolent carriage toward Joab, Absalom brought him to mediate for him. By his insolent message to the king, he gained his wishes. When parents and rulers countenance such imperious cha-

racters, they will soon experience the most fatal effects. See how easily wise and good men may be imposed upon by their own children that design ill, especially when blindly fond of them. Absalom, by the posture of his body, testified his submission to his father, and David sealed his pardon. Did the compassion of a father prevail to reconcile him to an impenitent son, and shall penitent sinners question the compassion of Him who is the Father of mercy? If Ephraim bemoan himself, God soon bemoans him, and pardons him with all the kind expressions of a fatherly tenderness; He is a dear son, and a pleasant child, Jer. 31. 20.

CHAPTER XV.

Ver. 1—6. *Absalom's ambition—He steals the hearts of the people.*

The sword had hitherto been among David's children; now it begins to be drawn against himself, with this aggravation, that he may thank himself for it; had he done justice upon the murderer, he had prevented the traitor. Absalom had learned of the king of Geshur, what was not allowed to the kings of Israel, to multiply horses, appearing in pomp and magnificence, above what had been seen in Jerusalem. David connives at it. Those parents know not what they do, who indulge a proud humour in their children: more young people are ruined by pride than by any one lust whatsoever. Those commonly are most ambitious of authority who least understand its duties. When ambition prompts, the most self-indulgent will appear diligent, the most haughty affable, and pay abject court to the meanest. Such make their way by traducing their superiors; the wisdom and perfection of an angel would be no security against them. By their arts and flatteries they steal the affections of the people, and prepare the way for tumults and rebellions.

Ver. 7—12. *Under the pretence of a vow, he makes a conspiracy at Hebron.*

Absalom's plot being ripe for execution, he asked leave of his father to go to Hebron. See how willing tender parents are to believe the best concerning their children, and, upon the least indication of good, to hope, even concerning those who have been untoward, that they will repent and reform. But how easy is

it for children to take advantage of their good parents' credulity, and to impose upon them with the show of religion, while still they are what they were! David was overjoyed to hear that Absalom was inclined to serve the Lord, and therefore readily gave him leave to go to Hebron, and to go thither with solemnity.

There went two hundred of the principal men of Jerusalem, whom he invited to join his feast upon his sacrifice; they went in their simplicity, not in the least suspecting that Absalom had any bad design in his journey. It is no new thing for very good men, and very good things, to be made use of by designing men, to put a colour upon bad practices. The project Absalom laid was to get himself proclaimed king throughout all the tribes of Israel. The person he especially courted, and relied upon in this affair, was Ahithophel, one that had been David's counsellor, his guide and his acquaintance, Psa. 55. 13; his familiar friend, in whom he trusted, which did eat of his bread, Psa. 41. 9. The people increased continually with Absalom, which made the conspiracy strong and formidable. But the majority is no certain rule by which to judge of equity. Pious persons are glad to see others appear religious, and this gives occasion for deceptions. The policy of wicked men, and the subtlety of Satan, are exerted to draw respectable persons to give an unintended and unsuspected countenance to the basest designs.

7. The syriac version, Josephus, Theodoret, and several manuscripts of the vulgate, read "four years." Some commentators propose to date the forty years from the time when David was first anointed. *Delany* considers that David had been unable to attend to the duties of his government, from sickness, which gave Absalom the advantage of acquiring the people's favour.

8. Esher in Edom. See *A. Clarke*.

Ver. 13—23. *David retires from Jerusalem.*

We may well imagine David in a manner thunderstruck, when he heard that the son he loved so dearly, and had so indulged, was unnaturally and ungratefully in arms against him. Let not parents raise their hopes too high from their children, lest they be disappointed. David consulting only with God and his own heart, determined immediately to quit Jerusalem. He took this resolve, as a penitent, submitting to the rod, and lying down under God's correcting hand.

Conscience now reminded him of his sin in the matter of Uriah, and the sentence he was under, which was, that evil should rise against him out of his own house. Now, thinks he, the word of God begins to be fulfilled, and it is not for me to contend with, or fight against it; God is righteous, and I submit. Before unrighteous Absalom he could justify himself, and stand out; but before the righteous God he must condemn himself, and yield to his judgments. Thus he accepts the punishment of his iniquity. Jerusalem was a great city, but it should seem by David's prayer, Psa. 51. 18, that it was not regularly fortified. Good men, when they suffer themselves, are anxious that others should not be involved with them in suffering.

David's servants faithfully adhered to him. He took his household with him, his wives and children, that he might protect them in this day of danger, and that they might be a comfort to him in this day of grief. Masters of families, in their greatest trials, must not neglect their households. He took with him the cherethites and pelethites, who were under the command of Benaiah; and the gittites, who were under the command of Ittai. These gittites seem to have been philistines of Gath, who entered themselves in David's service, having known him at Gath, and they adhered to him in his distress. The Son of David found not so great faith in Israel, as in a roman centurion, and a woman of Canaan. As many as would, of the people of Jerusalem, he took with him. He compelled none; they whose hearts were with Absalom, to Absalom let them go, and so shall their doom be; they will soon have enough of him. Christ enlists none but willing followers.

David dissuaded Ittai the gittite from going with him. David's tender spirit cannot bear to think that a stranger and an exile, a proselyte and a new convert, who ought to be encouraged and made easy, should meet with hard usage. Generous souls are more concerned at the share others have in their troubles, than at their own. Ittai shall be dismissed with a blessing; Mercy and truth be with thee; that is, God's mercy and truth, mercy according to promise, the promise made to those who renounce other gods, and put themselves under the wings of the Divine Majesty. This is a very

proper pious farewell, when we part with a friend; mercy and truth be with thee, and then thou art safe, and mayest be easy wherever thou art. David's dependence was upon the mercy and truth of God for comfort and happiness, both for himself and his friends: see Psa. 61. 7. But Ittai bravely resolves not to leave him, ver. 21. Such value has he for David, not for his wealth and greatness, but for his wisdom and goodness, which were still the same, that he will never leave him. He is a friend indeed, who loves at all times, and will adhere to us in adversity. Thus should we cleave to the Son of David, with full purpose of heart, that neither life nor death shall separate us from his love.

When David and his attendants passed over the brook Kedron, (the very same brook that Christ passed over when he entered upon his sufferings, John 18. 1,) all the country wept with a loud voice. Cause enough there was for weeping. To see their own prince thus wronged, who had been so great a blessing to their land; to see him in this distress and themselves unable to help him, might well draw tears from their eyes.

Ver. 24—30. *David sends back the ark.*

The priests and levites knew David's great affection to them and their office, notwithstanding his failings. Absalom made no impression upon them. David's speech shows him to be in a good frame of mind under his affliction, and that he held fast his integrity. He is very solicitous for the safety of the ark. It argues a good principle, to be more concerned for the church's prosperity than our own; to prefer the success of the gospel, and the flourishing of the church, above our own wealth, credit, ease, and safety, even when they are most in hazard. He is very desirous to return to the enjoyment of the privileges of God's house. He will reckon it the greatest instance of God's favour, if he may once more be brought back to see it, and God's habitation; this will be more his joy, than to be brought back to his own palace and throne. Gracious persons measure their comforts and conveniences in this world, by the opportunity they give them of communion with God. He is very submissive to the holy will of God, concerning the issue of his present dark dispensation. Observe with what satisfaction and holy complacency he speaks of the Divine disposal. Let

Him do what he will; submitting to his wisdom and goodness. It is our interest, as well as duty, cheerfully to acquiesce in the will of God, whatever befalls us. That we may not complain of what is, let us see God's hand in all events; and that we may not be afraid of what shall be, let us see all events in God's hand.

David put confidence in the priests, to serve him to the utmost of their power. He would encamp in the plain of the wilderness till he heard from them. Observe the posture that David and his men put themselves into, when they went up the mount of Olives. There was much of the displeasure of his God in it; this infused the wormwood and gall into the affliction and misery, Lam. 3. 19. His sin was ever before him, Psa. 51. 3; but never so plain, nor ever appearing so black as now. He never wept thus when Saul hunted him; but a wounded conscience makes troubles lie heavy, Psa. 38. 4.

Ver. 31—37. *David prays against Ahithophel's counsel, and takes measures to defeat it.*

When David heard that Ahithophel was in the plot, he lifted up his heart to God. He had not opportunity for a long prayer, but he was none of those that think they shall be heard for their much speaking. It was a fervent prayer. God is well pleased with the importunity of those that come to him with petitions. David was particular in this prayer; he names the person whose counsels he prays against. God gives us leave, in prayer, to be humbly and reverently free with him, and to mention the particular care, or fear, or grief, that lies heavy upon us. He prays not against Ahithophel's person, but against his counsel, that God would turn it into foolishness. David prayed this, in firm belief that God has all hearts in his hand, and tongues also; that, when he pleases, he can take away the understanding of the aged, and make the judges fools, Job 12. 17; Isa. 3. 2, 3; and in hope that God would own and plead his just and injured cause. We may pray in faith, and should pray with fervency, that God will turn that counsel into foolishness, which is taken against his people. But we must second our prayers with endeavours, else we tempt God. When David came to the top of the mount, he worshipped God. Weeping must not hinder worshipping, but quicken it. Now he composed the third

Psalm, as appears by the title. Providence brought Hushai to him; while he was yet speaking, God heard, and sent the person that should be instrumental to oppose Ahithophel. David, having full confidence in Hushai's conduct and faithfulness, sent him back to Jerusalem, that he might insinuate himself into Absalom's counsels, and defeat Ahithophel. How this gross dissimulation, which David put Hushai upon, can be justified, we do not see. But Absalom, if he rebel against his father, must stand upon his guard against all mankind. Hushai, thus instructed, came to Jerusalem, whither also Absalom soon after came with his forces. How soon do royal palaces and royal cities change masters! But we look for a kingdom which cannot be thus shaken, and in the possession of which we cannot be disturbed.

Alas! where shall we find wisdom and simplicity so united in any mere man, that we can perceive nothing which merits censure, and needs forgiveness? But when the Son of David was treated with all possible treachery, cruelty, and ingratitude, his wisdom, meekness, candour, and patience, were perfect. His sufferings are now over, his humiliation is exchanged for the throne of glory. Him let us follow, cleave to, and serve in tribulation, in life, and in death.

CHAPTER XVI.

Ver. 1—4. *Ziba by falsehood obtains Mephibosheth's inheritance.*

Ziba artfully formed a plan for obtaining Mephibosheth's estate. He succeeded. By his seasonable present, and insinuating behaviour, he prepossessed David in his favour, and then prejudiced him against Mephibosheth. Whatever Ziba intended in this present, God's providence sent it to David for his support. God makes use of bad men for good purposes to his people, and sends them meat by ravens. What immense damages masters often sustain by the lying tongues of their servants! Great men ought always to be jealous of flatterers, and be careful that they hear both sides.

1. Or, skin of wine: see note, Joshua 9. 4.

Ver. 5—14. *David cursed by Shimei.*

David bore Shimei's curses much better than Ziba's flatteries; by these he was brought to pass a wrong judgment on another, by those to pass a right judg-

ment on himself; the world's smiles are more dangerous than its frowns. David, in his flight, was come to Bahurim, a city of Benjamin, in which Shimei lived, who, being of the house of Saul, with the fall of which all his hopes of preferment fell, had implacable enmity to David. God knows what is in the hearts of those that are disaffected to him and his government; earthly princes do not: but now Shimei came forth, and cursed David with all the bad words and wishes he could invent. What could this foul mouth say against him? What was done to the house of Saul, is the only thing with which he upbraids him, because that was the thing which he himself was a loser by. See how apt we are to judge of men and their character, by what they are to us. So partial are we to ourselves, that no rule can be more fallacious than this. No man could be more innocent of the blood of the house of Saul than David was. Once and again he spared Saul's life, while Saul sought his. Innocence is no fence against malice and falsehood; nor are we to think it strange, if we are charged with that which we have been most careful to keep ourselves from. It is well for us, that men are not to be our judges, but He, whose judgment is according to truth.

If David had been a bloody man and disposed to slay the family of Saul, Shimei would soon have suffered; he merited condemnation. See how forward malicious men are to press God's judgments into the service of their own passion and revenge. But we must take heed, lest we wrong God by seeking to make his providence patronize our foolish and unjust resentments. See how patient and submissive David was under this abuse. Let this remind us of the Judge of the world, who in his humiliation for our sins, bare with, and prayed for those who reviled and crucified him. And thus Christ rebuked the disciples, who, in zeal for his honour, would have fire come down from heaven on the town that affronted him, Luke 9. 55. Let us see with what considerations David quieted himself. The chief thing that silenced him, was, that he had deserved it. Shimei unjustly upbraided David with the blood of Saul; from that his conscience acquitted him, but, at the same time, charged him with the blood of Uriah. A humble, tender spirit will turn reproaches

into reproofs, and so get good from them, instead of being provoked by them.

David observes the hand of God in it. As it was Shimei's sin, it was not from God, but from the devil, and his own wicked heart; nor did God's hand in David's trouble, excuse Shimei, much less justify him, any more than their sin, who put Christ to death, Acts 2. 23; 4. 28. But as it was David's affliction, it was from the Lord, one evil which he raised up against him. David looked above the instrument of his trouble to the supreme Director, as Job, when the plunderers had stripped him, acknowledges, The Lord hath taken away. Nothing more proper to quiet a gracious soul under affliction, than looking to the hand of God in it. He quiets himself under the lesser affliction, with the consideration of the greater. My son seeks my life, much more may this benjamite. Tribulation works patience in those that are sanctified; what tries our patience, should improve it. Marvel not that enemies are injurious, when even friends are unkind; nor that friends are unkind, when even children are undutiful. He comforts himself with hopes that God would bring good out of his affliction, and recompense patience under it. We may depend upon God to repay not only our services, but our sufferings.

13. Shimei's conduct shows the extreme contempt and unpopularity into which David had fallen.

Ver. 15—23. *Hushai's pretended friendship for Absalom—Ahithophel's counsel.*

God suffers wicked men to prosper a while in their wicked plots, even beyond their expectation, that their disappointment may be the more grievous and disgraceful. The most celebrated counselors of that age, were Ahithophel and Hushai; Absalom cannot but think himself sure of success, when he has both these; on them he relies, and consults not the ark, though he had that with him. But miserable counsellors were they both! Hushai would never counsel him to do wisely, he was really his enemy. What arts of dissimulation are those tempted to use, who govern themselves by fleshly wisdom! and how happy are they, who have not known these depths of Satan, but have their conversation in the world with simplicity, and godly sincerity! Ahithophel counselled him to do wickedly, and so did as effectually be-

tray him, as he did, who was designedly false to him: for they that advise men to sin, certainly advise them to their hurt; and that government which is founded in sin, is founded in the sand. Many excel in worldly wisdom, who are utterly destitute of heavenly grace; those who set up for oracles themselves, are apt to despise the oracles of God. The greatest statesmen are seldom the greatest saints. But frequently the greatest politicians act most foolishly for themselves. After all, honesty is the best policy, and will be found so in the long run. Ahithophel gave wicked counsel to Absalom: he would render himself so odious to his father, that he would never be reconciled to him, which would strengthen the hands of his party, and keep them to him. This cursed policy showed him rather an oracle of the devil, than of God. This counsel entirely suited Absalom's lewd and wicked mind, and he delayed not to put it in execution. How desperately wicked is the human heart, that can conceive, execute, and glory in such deeds of evil!

CHAPTER XVII.

Ver. 1—14. *Ahithophel's counsel overthrown by Hushai.*

The contest between David and Absalom soon hastened to a crisis. It must be determined by the sword, and preparation is made accordingly. David, and all that adhered to him, must be cut off. None dare mention his personal merits, and great services to his country. David must be destroyed; all the question is, how it can be done. Absalom declared his design to be upon David's life, and Ahithophel concurred with him. Nothing would have been more fatal to David, than taking these measures. Compare with this the plot of Caiaphas (that second Ahithophel) against the Son of David, to crush his interest by destroying him; Let that one man die for the people, John 11. 50. Kill the heir, and the inheritance shall be ours, Matt. 21. 38. But the counsels of both were turned into foolishness. Yet the children of light may in their generation learn wisdom from the children of this world. What our hand finds to do, let us do quickly, and with all our might. It is prudence to be vigorous and expeditious, and not to lose time. Particu-

larly in our spiritual warfare, if Satan flee from us, let us follow our blow.

This was a wonderful effect of Divine providence blinding Absalom's mind and influencing his heart, that he could not rest in Ahithophel's counsel, though so wise, and approved by his whole party, and that he should desire Hushai's advice, though not equal in reputation for wisdom, and he had given no proof of fidelity for Absalom, nor was he fixed by his interest as Ahithophel. There was just cause to suspect him and his counsel too. But there is no contending with that God who can arm a man against himself, and destroy him by his own mistakes and passions, without other help.—(54.)

Hushai advises that they be not too hasty in pursuing David. In giving this counsel, he really intended to serve David and his interest; that he might have time to send notice of these proceedings, and that David might gain time to gather an army, and to remove into those countries beyond Jordan, which, laying more remote, Absalom, probably, had least interest in. Hushai counsels Absalom to do nothing rashly, but to proceed with caution, and secure his success by securing his strength. Absalom invited Hushai to advise him. Ahithophel's former counsel was followed, for God intended to correct David; but his latter counsel was not followed, for God meant not to destroy him. The Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel. Be it observed to the comfort of all that fear God, he turns all men's hearts as the rivers of waters, though they know not the thoughts of the Lord. He stands in the congregation of the mighty, can overrule all counsels, and negative all resolves; he laughs at men's projects against his anointed.

Ver. 15—21. *Hushai sends information to David.*

Hushai feared lest Absalom should change his mind. He was convinced that Absalom was determined to murder his father if possible, therefore sent him word to provide immediately for his safety. But whatever wisdom, address, despatch, or assistance, any man employs or affords, the success is from God alone, who will not suffer his people to perish. The messengers being preserved in a remarkable manner, brought their intelligence very faithfully to David, ver. 21, with the advice of his friends, that he should not

delay to pass over Jordan, near to which he now was. There, as some think, he penned the 42d and 43d Psalms, looking back upon Jerusalem from the land of Jordan, Psa. 42. 6.

Ver. 22—29. *Ahithophel hangs himself—
Absalom pursues David.*

David and all his forces went over Jordan in the night; how does not appear. But special notice may be taken of this, that there lacked not one of them; none deserted him, though his distress was great, none stayed behind sick or weary, nor were any lost or cast away in passing the river. Herein some make him a type of the Messiah, who said, in a difficult day, Of all that thou hast given me have I lost none. Being got over Jordan, he marched forward to Mahanaim, a levite's city in the tribe of Gad, in the utmost border of that tribe.

Ahithophel died by his own hands; he hanged himself for vexation that his counsel was not followed. See what real enemies they are to themselves who think too well of themselves, and what mischiefs they run upon who are impatient of contempt. That will break a proud man's heart which will not break a humble man's sleep. He also thought himself endangered, concluding, that, because his counsel was not followed, Absalom's cause would miscarry, and then, whoever would find David's mercy, he must be sacrificed to his justice. To prevent a public execution, he does justice upon himself, and after all his reputation for wisdom, by this his last act answers his name Ahithophel, which signifies the brother of a fool! Nothing indicates so much folly as self-murder. Observe how deliberately he did it. Herein we may see, 1. Contempt poured upon the wisdom of man; he that was more renowned for policy than any man, plays the fool with himself more abundantly. Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, when he sees him that was so great an oracle dying as a fool dies. 2. Honour done to the justice of God. When the wicked are thus snared in the work of their own hands, and sunk in a pit of their own digging, the Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth. 3. Prayer is answered, and an honest cause served even by its enemies. Now, as David had prayed, Ahithophel's counsel was turned into foolishness to himself. Lightfoot supposes that David penned the 55th

Psalm upon occasion of Ahithophel's being in the plot against him, and that he is the man complained of, who had been his equal, his guide, and his acquaintance; and if so, this was an immediate answer to his prayer. Ahithophel's death was an advantage to David's interest. It is well that that breath is stopped, and that head laid low, from which nothing could be expected but mischief.

Absalom had got the men of Israel with him, and he passed over Jordan. Not content that he had driven his good father to the further part of his kingdom, he resolved to chase him out of the world. Absalom made Amasa his general, who was the same relation to David as Joab.

David met with friends in this distant country. Even Shobi, a younger brother of the royal family of the ammonites, was kind to him. Those who think their prosperity most confirmed, know not but, some time or other, they may stand in need of the kindness of those who now lie at their mercy, and may be glad to be beholden to them; which is a reason why we should, as we have opportunity, do good to all men, for he that watereth shall be watered also himself, when there is occasion. These, compassionating David and his men, in token of their dutiful affection to him, their firm adherence to his government, and their sincere concern for him in his present straits, of their own good-will, brought plenty of all that which he had occasion for. Let us learn hence to be generous and open-handed, according as our ability is, to all in distress, especially great men, to whom it is most grievous, and good men, who deserve better treatment. Observe here how God sometimes makes up to his people that comfort from strangers, which they are disappointed of in their own families.

Our King, indeed, needs not our help; but he assures us, that what we do for the least of his brethren, who are sick, poor, and destitute, shall be accepted and recompensed as if done to himself.

23. *Delany* considers that Ahithophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba, see ch. 11. 3, and 23. 34, and this accounts for his rancour and personal revenges.

25. An ishmaelite, see 1 Chron. 2. 17. It stands so in some copies.

Psalms 3. 7. 42. 43. 55. 4. 5. 62. 143. 144. 70. are supposed to refer to David's flight from Absalom.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Ver. 1—8. *Absalom's army defeated.*

David seems not to have doubted of victory after his prayer against Ahithophel had been so remarkably answered. The people would by no means have him expose himself; not only from affection to David, but from a proper estimate of the importance of his life to the nation, which was likely to sink into misery and ungodliness if Absalom succeeded.

How does David render good for evil! Absalom would have only David smitten, David would have only Absalom spared. What foils are these to each other! Never was unnatural hatred to a father more strong than in Absalom; nor was ever natural affection to a child more strong than in David; they showed how bad it is possible for a child to be to the best of fathers, and how good it is possible for a father to be to the worst of children; as if designed to be a resemblance of man's wickedness towards God, and God's mercy towards man, of which it is hard to say which is most amazing. Bishop Hall thus descants on this: What means this ill-placed love? this unjust mercy? Deal gently with a traitor! Of all traitors, with a son! Of all sons, with an Absalom! That graceless darling of so good a father! And all this for thy sake, whose crown, whose blood he hunts after! For whose sake must he be pursued, if forborne for thine? Must the cause of the quarrel be the motive of mercy? Even in the holiest parents, nature may be guilty of an injurious tenderness, of a bloody indulgence. But was not this done in type of that unmeasurable mercy of the true King and Redeemer of Israel, who prayed for his persecutors, for his murderers, Father, forgive them? Deal gently with them for my sake. When God sends an affliction to correct his children, it is with this charge, Deal gently with them for my sake; for he knows our frame, and visits us in mercy.

Now the israelites see what it is to take counsel against the Lord and his Anointed, and to think of breaking his bands asunder. They might see that God fought against them. They are conquered by a few, an army, in all probability, much inferior in number. They destroyed themselves by the flight with which they hoped to save themselves. The wood they sought to for shelter devoured more than the sword: they might

see when they thought themselves safe from David's men, that the justice of God pursued them, and suffered them not to live. What refuge can rebels find from Divine vengeance? The pits and bogs, the stumps and thickets, and as the chaldee paraphrast understands, the wild beasts of the forest were, probably, the death of many dispersed, distracted israelites, besides numbers slain with the sword, in the pursuit through the woods.

Ver. 9—18. *Absalom, hanging in an oak, is slain by Joab.*

Finding the servants of David were near him, Absalom made the best of his way, and so rode headlong upon his own destruction. David was inclined to spare him, but Divine justice passed sentence upon him. Riding furiously under a great oak, which hung low, either the twisted branches, or some one forked bough of the oak, caught hold of his head, either by his neck, or as some think, by the long hair, which had been so much his pride, and was now justly made a halter for him, and there he hung entangled. The more he struggled, the more he was embarrassed, till Joab put him to death. His fate was as extraordinary as his crimes. Being thus, by the immediate interposition of Providence, hanged on a tree, he was, as it were, pronounced accursed of God himself. Let young people look upon Absalom, suspended on the tree, accursed, forsaken of heaven and earth; there let them read the Lord's abhorrence of rebellion against parents! Let them consider the agony of his death, the ignominy of his burial; and learn how empty are all outward embellishments, how vain the flattery of man, and all care employed in rendering themselves admired and renowned. Nothing can preserve from misery and contempt, but heavenly wisdom and the grace of God. This may be said for Joab, that while he broke the order of a too indulgent father, he did real service to his king and country, and would have endangered the welfare of both, if he had not acted thus.

Ver. 19—33. *David's over sorrow for Absalom.*

Ahimaaz desired that he might have the pleasure and satisfaction of bringing the good news to the king, whom he loved. Joab knew David better than Ahimaaz, and that the tidings of Absalom's death, which must conclude the story, would spoil the acceptableness of all the rest, and he loved Ahimaaz too well to

let him be the messenger of those tidings. Ahimaaz, it seems, was so famous for running, that he was known by it at a distance; and it is taken for granted, if he be the messenger the news must be good: he is a good man, zealously affected to the king's interest! It is pity but the good tidings of the gospel should always be brought by good men; and how welcome should they be to us for their message' sake!

By directing David to give God thanks for his victory, Ahimaaz prepared him for the approaching news of its allay. The more our hearts are fixed and enlarged in thanksgiving to God for our mercies, the better disposed we shall be to bear with patience the afflictions mixed with them. Ahimaaz soon discerned that the death of the king's son would make the tidings of the day very unwelcome, and therefore in his report leaves that matter doubtful. When David received the intelligence of Cush, he forgot all the joy of his deliverance, and was quite overwhelmed with the sorrowful tidings of Absalom's death. Some think his wish arose from concern about Absalom's everlasting state, and that he wished to have died for him, because he had good hopes of his own salvation, and of Absalom's repentance if he had lived; but it rather seems to have been spoken inconsiderately, and it was his infirmity. He is to be blamed, 1. For showing so great fondness for a graceless son, who was justly abandoned both of God and man. 2. For quarrelling, not only with Divine providence, in the disposals of which he ought silently to acquiesce, but Divine justice, the judgments of which he ought to adore. 3. For opposing the justice of the nation, of which, as king, he was intrusted with the administration, and which, with other public interests, he ought to prefer before any natural affection. The best men are not always in a good frame; for what we over-loved, we are apt to over-grieve. In each affection it is wisdom to have rule over our own spirits, and to keep strict guard upon ourselves when that is removed from us, which was very dear to us. But while we learn from this example to watch and pray against partial and excessive attachments, against indulgence or neglect of our children, and against passionately indulged grief; to adore the mercy of God in our deliverances, and to view his appointments in our sharpest trials—may we not, in David, perceive a

shadow of the Saviour's love, who wept over, prayed for, and even suffered death for us, vile rebels and enemies, without even excepting those who persecuted and crucified him?

CHAPTER XIX.

Ver. 1—8. *Joab causes David to cease his mourning.*

When Joab and the army came to the city, they found the king mourning. He avows his grief, O my son Absalom! My servants are safe, but where is my son? He is dead; and, dying in sin, I fear he is lost for ever. I cannot now say, I shall go to him, for my soul shall not be gathered with such sinners; what shall be done for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son! To continue to lament thus for so bad a son as Absalom, was very unwise and very unworthy, and was ill taken by the people. And Joab censures David, but not with the respect and deference he owed. A plain case may be fairly pleaded with those above us, and they may be reproved for what they do amiss, but it must not be with rudeness and insolence. Those who have faithfully served us expect we should appear pleased, and will be grieved and disheartened if frowned upon. David took the reproof and counsel prudently and mildly, and all was well. When convinced of a fault we must amend, though we are told of it by our inferiors, and in heat and passion. Timely concessions usually prevent the ill effects of mistaken measures.

Ver. 9—15. *David returns to Jordan.*

From the time that David began to reign in Hebron over the tribe of Judah only, the distinction between Judah and Israel began to be more observed. David did not immediately go back with his victorious army. He would come back with the consent and unanimous approbation of the people, not as a conqueror forcing his way; he would come back, not at the head of his forces, but in the arms of his subjects.

The men of Israel, that is, the ten tribes, were the first that talked of this. Mutual excitements to do a good work are laudable, but not mutual accusations for not doing it. Usually when public services are neglected, all must share in the blame; each might do more than he does, in reformation of manners, healing of divisions, and the like. The men of Judah, by David's contrivance, were the

first. He employs Zadok and Abiathar. Many will follow in a good work who will not lead. It is a pity that they should continue idle for want of being spoken to. David particularly courts to his interest Amasa, who had been Absalom's general, but was his own nephew as well as Joab. Sometimes there is nothing lost in purchasing the friendship of one that has been an enemy. Amasa's interest might do David good service at this juncture, Joab being now become intolerably haughty.

God's providence, by the priests' persuasions and Amasa's interest, brought the people to resolve the recall of the king. David stirred not till he received this invitation. Our Lord Jesus will rule in those that invite him to the throne in their hearts, and not till he is invited. He first bows the heart, and makes it willing in the day of his power, then rules in the midst of his enemies, *Psa. 110. 2, 3.* But in acts of clemency to those who have been open offenders, we should be careful not to disgust such as have deserved better of us, though in some respects they may fail of their duty; whatever exposes a man to envy or rivalry probably will prove injurious to him. David did not act with prudence herein.

Ver. 16—23. *David pardons Shimei.*

David, in his afflictive flight, remembered God, particularly from the land of Jordan, *Psa. 42. 6*; now that land, more than any other, was graced with the glories of his return. Two remarkable persons met him on the banks of Jordan, who had abused him grievously when in his flight. 1. Ziba, who had abused David with his fair tongue, and, by accusing his master, Mephibosheth, had obtained from the king a grant of his estate. 2. Shimei, who had abused him with his foul tongue, railed at him, and cursed him. Now that he sees him coming home in triumph, and returning to his throne, he thinks it his interest to make his peace with him. Those who now slight and abuse the Son of David, would be glad to make their peace when he shall come in his glory; but it will be too late! Shimei lost no time. Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way, *Matt. 5. 25.* And David's experience of God's mercy in restoring him to his kingdom, the exclusion from which he attributed to his sin, inclined him to show mercy to Shimei. They that are

forgiven, must forgive. David had severely avenged the abuses done to his ambassadors by the ammonites, but easily passes by the abuses done to himself by an israelite. This was purely personal, and according to the usual disposition of good men, he could more easily forgive it. Acts of severity seldom are acts of policy; The throne is established by mercy. Shimei has his pardon, yet is liable to be punished if he afterward misbehaved; thus he was reserved to be a monument of the justice of the government, as he was now of its clemency, and in both of its prudence.

Ver. 24—30. *Mephibosheth excused.*

As a proof of the sincerity of Mephibosheth's joy in the king's return, we are here told he mourned for the king's banishment. He complained of Ziba, his servant, who should have been his friend, but had been his enemy. How much mischief is it in the power of a wicked servant to do to the best master! He gratefully acknowledged the king's great kindness to himself, when he and all his father's house were at the king's mercy, and referred himself to the king's pleasure. We were all as dead men before God; yet he has not only spared us, but taken us to sit at his table. How little reason then have we to complain of any trouble we are in! and how much reason to take all well that God does!

Whether David did not fully credit Mephibosheth, or whether he was ashamed of his credulity, and wished it not to be further noticed, he suffered Ziba to escape the extent of punishment he seems to have deserved. David however recalls the forfeiture of Mephibosheth's estate; being deceived in that grant, he confirms his former settlement, I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land, ver. 29. And Mephibosheth loses all his cares in his joy for the king's return. A good man can contentedly bear his own private losses and disappointments, while he sees Israel in peace, and the throne of the Son of David exalted and established.

26. There is great reason to question whether the behaviour of Mephibosheth was so innocent as asserted by some. He seems to have been very well pleased to stay at Jerusalem, and wait the issue of the rebellion, as not knowing but that some circumstances might arise by which he might be advanced to the throne.—*Chandler.*

Ver. 31—39. *David's parting with Barzillai.*

David graced the triumphs of his restoration by generously remitting the

injuries done him; and he graced them with a generous reward of the kindnesses that had been shown him. Barzillai thought he had done himself honour in doing the king any service. Thus, when the saints shall be called to inherit the kingdom, in consideration of what they had done for Christ in this world, they will be amazed at the disproportion between the service and the recompence, Matt. 25. 37. Barzillai declines accepting the king's invitation, but begs pardon for refusing so generous an offer. He should think himself very happy in being near the king, but is old, and unfit to remove at all; for, How long have I to live? ver. 34. Old, and unfit for the business and diversions of the court. As it was in Moses' time, so it was in Barzillai's, and it is so now, that if men are so strong that they come to fourscore years, their strength then is labour and sorrow, Psa. 90. 10. There were then, and are still, years of which men say they have no pleasure in them, Eccl. 12. 1. Let those who are old, learn of Barzillai to be dead to the delights of sense. Nay, Barzillai, being old, thinks he shall be a burden to the king, rather than any credit to him; and a good man would not go any where to be burdensome; or, if he must be so, will rather be so to his own house than to another's. Also he is near death, and must begin to think of his removal out of the world. It is good for us all, but especially becomes old people, to think and speak much of dying. The grave is ready for me, let me go and get ready for it. He desires the king to be kind to his son Chimham. They that are old must not grudge young people the lawful delights, which they themselves are past enjoying, nor oblige them to retire as they do. Though he could ill spare Chimham, yet, thinking it would gratify and improve him, he is willing to let him go. David sends Barzillai back to his country with a blessing, signifying that, in gratitude for his kindnesses, he would love him and pray for him; and with a promise, that, whatever request he should at any time make, he would be ready to oblige him. What is the chief excellency of power but that it gives men capacity of doing the more good?

Ver. 40—43. *The men of Israel quarrel with the men of Judah.*

By the time David had passed over Jordan, part of the elders of Israel came

to bring him back. They were disgusted to find all settled without them. This might have been expected from the natural jealousy of the human heart. They thought themselves despised, and that the men of Judah took too much upon them. The fiercer words which the men of Judah returned produced very bad effects. Much evil might be avoided if men would watch against pride, and remember that a soft answer turneth away wrath. Though we have right and reason on our side, if we speak it with fierceness, God takes notice, and is much displeased.

Here again some glimpses may be discerned of the glorious character and kingdom of David's Son and David's Lord. Though anointed of his Father to be King upon his holy hill of Zion, he reigns over a willing people, who deem it a privilege to be his subjects. Once indeed they were rebels, and numbers perish in their rebellion. When sensible of their danger they were afraid or unwilling to submit, till his ministers, representing his tender love and brotherly relation, and by his promises of pardon and preferment, through the influences of his Spirit, bowed their hearts to humble willingness that he should reign over them. Then He readily pardoned and accepted them; on no account would he cast out or cut off the worst offender that cries for his mercy. His friends sincerely mourn when his cause is opposed, and rejoice when it prospers, however it fares with them as to worldly circumstances. He will recompense those who, from love to him, feed his servants, with a place in his holy city; he will feast them with provisions of his house, and bless their children after them. Alas! that while this King himself is so plenteous in mercy, many of his professed servants should be envious and contentious with each other upon unimportant concerns. May all who are called by his name follow the example of his humility and meekness, and rejoice in seeing the common good promoted, whoever may have the credit of being the instrument; and may they all endeavour, both in public and in families, to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

CHAPTER XX.

Ver. 1—3. *Sheba's rebellion.*

One trial arises after another for our salutary chastisement, till we reach the

place where sin and sorrow are for ever excluded. Angry disputants misunderstand or misconstrue one another's words—proud men will either have every thing their own way, or will wholly refuse their assistance. The favour of the many is not to be depended upon; and what have others to expect, when Hosanna to the Son of David was so soon changed into, Crucify him, crucify him?

The perverting words is the subverting of peace; and much mischief is made by misrepresenting or misconstruing what is said and written, and drawing consequences never intended. The men of Judah said, The king is near of kin to us, by which, say the men of Israel, you mean, We have no part in him; whereas they meant no such thing. Satan, if permitted, will be sure to excite such ring-leaders, and God, in his wise and holy sovereignty, is pleased to permit them, that he may inflict correction.

Ver. 4—13. *Amasa slain by Joab.*

The men of Judah, though forward to attend the king's triumphs, were backward to fight his battles. Many boast of their being akin to Christ, that yet are very loth to venture for him. Amasa is sent to assemble the men of Judah within three days; but he finds them so backward and unready, that he cannot do it within the time appointed. Upon Amasa's delay, Abishai, the brother of Joab, is ordered to pursue Sheba. David gives these orders to Abishai, because he resolves to mortify Joab. How slippery are earthly honours, and subject to continual changes! Happy are they who are in favour with Him in whom there is no shadow of change. But Joab barbarously murders Amasa, subtilly, and with contrivance, and not upon sudden provocation. The more there is of plot in a sin, the worse it is. This might have scattered the king's forces, or engaged one part against another, and have made all an easy prey to Sheba. So contentedly could Joab sacrifice the interest both of king and kingdom to his personal revenge. But one would wonder with what face a murderer could pursue a traitor; and how, under such a heavy load of guilt, he had courage to enter upon danger—his conscience was seared with a hot iron.

Ver. 14—22. *Sheba takes refuge in Abel—That city saved by the wise counsel of a woman.*

Sheba entered Abel Beth-Maacah, a

strong city in the north, in the lot of Naphtali. Here he took shelter. Joab besieged the city. Justly is that place attacked with fury, which dares to harbour a traitor; nor will that heart fare better which indulges rebellious lusts that will not have Christ to reign over them. A discreet woman, by her prudent management, satisfied Joab, and yet saved the city. Wisdom is not restricted to rank or sex; it consists not in extensive knowledge or ingenious speculations; but in understanding how to act as circumstances arise, that calamities may be averted and benefits secured. She reasons with him on behalf of her city; that it was a city famous for wisdom; and that the inhabitants were generally peaceable and faithful in Israel. She tacitly upbraids Joab for not offering them peace, but hopes it is not too late to beg it. Joab and Abel's advocate soon agree. A great deal of mischief would be prevented, if contending parties would understand one another. Let both sides be undeceived, and the matter is soon accommodated. The single condition of peace, is, the surrender of the traitor; it is so in God's dealing with the soul, when besieged by conviction and distress; sin is the traitor; the beloved lust is the rebel: part with that, cast away the transgressions, and all shall be well. No peace on any other terms. Our wise woman immediately agrees to the proposal. She went to them in her wisdom, and persuaded them to cut off Sheba's head, and it was thrown over the wall to Joab. Thus when the sinner perceives, through the Saviour's mediation, that his offended Lord seeks not his destruction but that of his sins, he becomes willing that they should be crucified; receiving pardon and grace from God, he becomes peaceable, faithful, and useful in Israel.

18. The word rendered "old time," refers to the beginning of the siege. As if she had said, "When the people saw thee lay siege to the city, they said, Surely they will ask us if we will have peace, and then we shall soon come to an agreement and make an end."—*Chandler*. She might have had authority in the city.

Ver. 23—26. *David's officers.*

Here is an account of the state of David's court, after his restoration. Joab was continued general, being too great to be displaced. Benaiah, as before, captain of the guards. Here is one new office erected, which we had not, ch. 8. 16, that

of treasurer, or one over the tribute, for it was not till toward the latter end of his time, that David began to raise taxes. Adoram was long in this office, but it cost him his life at last, 1 Kings 12. 18.

See note 1 Kings 4. 7.

CHAPTER XXI.

Ver. 1—9. *The gibeonites avenged.*

Every affliction arises from sin, and should excite us to repentance and humiliation before God; but some troubles especially proclaim that they were sent to bring sin to remembrance. We do not read in the history of Saul concerning this injury to the gibeonites. He did not extirpate the amalekites, philistines, and other nations whom God commanded him to destroy; but the gibeonites might be oppressed with greater ease and safety to himself. Perhaps Saul was the more ready to do this for their being devoted to the service of the priests and the sanctuary. What made this exceedingly sinful, was, that Saul not only shed innocent blood, but violated the solemn oath by which the nation was bound to protect the gibeonites, Josh. 9. 15. We find the nation of Israel chastised with famine, for this sin of Saul. When we are under God's judgments, we ought to inquire into the grounds of the controversy. God's judgments often look a great way back, which requires us to do so, when we are under his rebukes. It is not for us to object against the people's smarting for the sin of their king; perhaps they aided—nor against this generation suffering for the sin of the last; God often visits the sins of the fathers upon the children, and his judgments are a great deep. He gives no account of any matters. Time does not wear out the guilt of sin; nor can we build hopes of impunity upon the delay of judgments.

If we cannot comprehend all the reasons of Providence in this dispensation, still we have no right to demand that God should acquaint us with those reasons. It must be right, because it is the constitution of God. We are not obliged to account for all the reasons by which God proceeds in the administration of his providence, and should be content to be ignorant whenever those reasons are not revealed to us.—(13.)

The gibeonites required no silver or gold. Money is no satisfaction for blood,

see Num. 35. 31—33. It is the ancient law, Gen. 9. 6. They required no lives but of Saul's family. The children, in an ordinary course of law, were never to be put to death for the parents, but this case of the gibeonites was altogether extraordinary. God had, no doubt, put it into the heart of the gibeonites to make this demand, for he owned what was done, ver. 14, and his judgments are not subject to the rules to which men's judgments must be subject. Let parents take heed of sin, especially of cruelty and oppression, for their children's sake, who may smart for it by the just hand of God, when they are in their graves. Guilt and a curse are a bad entail upon a family. It should seem, Saul's posterity trod in his steps, for it is called a bloody house. It was the spirit of the family, therefore they are justly reckoned with for his sin, as well as for their own.

The gibeonites did not require this out of malice against Saul or his family, but out of love to the people of Israel, whom they saw plagued for the injury done to them. We will hang them up unto the Lord, to satisfy his justice, not to gratify any revenge of our own; for the good of the public, not for our own reputation. The nomination of the persons they left to David; who secured Mephibosheth for Jonathan's sake, that while avenging the breach of one oath, he might not break another, but he delivered up two of Saul's sons, whom he had by a concubine, and five of his grandsons, whom his daughter Merab bore to Adriel, 1 Sam. 18. 19, but his daughter Michal brought up, ver. 8.

The place, time, and manner of execution, all added to the solemnity of their being sacrificed to Divine justice. They were hanged up as anathemas, under a peculiar mark of God's displeasure, for the law had said, He that is hanged is accursed of God, Deut. 21. 23; Gal. 3. 13. Christ, being made a curse for us, and dying to satisfy for our sins, and to turn away the wrath of God, became obedient to this ignominious death. They were hanged up in Gibeah of Saul, to show they died for his sin. They were put to death at the beginning of harvest, to show they were thus sacrificed for turning away the wrath of God, who had withheld from them their harvest-mercies for some years past, and to obtain his favour in the present harvest.

Thus there is no way of appeasing God's anger, but by mortifying and crucifying our lusts and corruptions. In vain do we expect mercy from God, unless we do justice upon our sins. Those executions must not be complained of as cruel, which are become necessary to the public welfare.

8. Saul's children by a concubine and the children of his daughter were incapable of inheriting his crown, especially as there continued a lineal descent in the male line from Saul himself. David, under a necessity of delivering up some of his predecessor's family to justice, preserved the claimants to his crown alive, and delivered up those only from whom he could have nothing to fear, as having no kind of legal right to the government and kingdom.—*Chandler*.

Ver. 10—14. *Rizpah's care for the bodies of Saul's descendants.*

That a guilty land should experience successive years of plenty, calls for our admiring gratitude, and we need not wonder if misused abundance should be punished with scarcity; yet in such cases how few are disposed to inquire of the Lord concerning the sinful cause, while the ingenuity of numbers is employed in discovering the second causes by which he is pleased to work. But the Lord will plead the cause of those who cannot or will not avenge themselves; and the prayers of the poor are of great efficacy.

Saul's sons and grandsons died as anathemas, because iniquity was laid upon them. When our blessed Saviour was made sin for us, he was made a curse for us. But how shall we reconcile this with the law, which expressly required those that were hanged to be buried on the same day? Deut. 21. 23. They were sacrificed, not to the justice of the nation, but for the crime of the nation; no less a crime than the violation of the public faith, and for the deliverance of the nation from no less a judgment than a general famine.

Rizpah watched their dead bodies. Thus she let the world know that her sons died, not as stubborn and rebellious sons, whose eye had despised to obey their mother, Prov. 30. 17. They died for their father's sin, therefore her mind could not be alienated from them. Though they must die, yet they died pitied and lamented. David was so far from being displeased with Rizpah, that he was stirred up by it to do honour to the house of Saul. Thus it appeared he had not desired the woful day, but that he was obliged to do this for the public good.

He now removed the bodies of Saul and Jonathan from the place where the men of Jabesh-gilead had interred them. With them he buried the bodies of those who were hanged; for when God's anger was turned away, they were no longer to be looked upon as a curse. When God sent rain to water the earth, they were taken down, for then it appeared that God was entreated for the land. When justice is done on earth, vengeance from heaven ceases. Through Christ, who was hanged on a tree, and so made a curse for us, to expiate our guilt, though he was himself guiltless, God is pacified, and is entreated for us.

The crime of Saul was a wilful breach of the laws of God and man, a perjured violation of the national faith and honour, which it became God, the supreme Governor of the Jewish nation, to manifest his displeasure against. The death of this part of Saul's family was to be a public attestation of God's abhorrence of Saul's perfidy and cruelty, to caution others against the like offences, and especially to prevent all future attempts against the Gibeonites. God has a sovereign right over the lives of all men; he did these persons (even if innocent of being personally concerned in the destruction of the Gibeonites) no more injustice than if he had taken them away by any kind of natural death, which is a right he exercises in the daily dispensations of his providence. Children very frequently suffer and die for the sins of their parents, as is evident from the constant experience of all ages and nations. Thus David's first child by Bathsheba, and Jeroboam's eldest son; and, for any thing we can tell, their death, instead of a punishment, might be a real blessing to them. Why might not God, by an immediate command, appoint some of Saul's family to be put to death for his sins, as well as command a pestilence or an earthquake to destroy children of other families for the crimes of their parents? In both cases the loss of such children's lives is equally the appointment of God, who hath a supreme and unalienable right over life. It is his gift, given for that period only which he intended, and may be resumed when he demands it.—*From Chandler.*

10. The birds and beasts of prey in the east devour the flesh from a dead body in a very few hours, if it is left exposed; often attacking an animal before life has wholly departed.

Ver. 15—22. *Battles with the Philistines—The giants slain.*

These events seem to have occurred towards the end of David's reign. The Philistines, though frequently vanquished, were not wholly subdued, and the remains of the Anakims, of enormous size and strength, gave David and his servants opportunities of signaling their courage, also repeated proofs of the Lord's truth and goodness. David himself took part in slaying these giants. David fainted, but he did not flee; though his strength failed him, he bravely kept his ground,

and God sent help in the time of need. In spiritual conflicts, even strong saints sometimes wax faint; then Satan attacks them furiously; but they that stand their ground and resist him, shall be relieved, and made more than conquerors. David's servants, hereupon, resolved that he should never expose himself thus any more. They had easily persuaded him not to fight against Absalom, ch. 18. 3, but against the Philistines he would go, till having had this narrow escape, it was resolved, that the light of Israel, its guide and glory, so David was, should never be put again into such hazard of being extinguished.

It is folly for the strong man to glory in his strength; David's servants were no larger or stronger than other men; yet thus, by Divine assistance, they mastered one giant after another. God chooses by weak things to confound the mighty. And thus it is common for those to go down slain to the pit, who have been the terror of the mighty in the land of the living, Ezek. 32. 27. The most powerful enemies are often reserved for the last conflict. David began his glory with the conquest of one giant, and concluded it with the conquest of four. Death is a Christian's last enemy, and a son of Anak; but through him that triumphed for us, we hope to be more than conquerors at last, even over that enemy. The believer, having peace with God, need not fear the stoutest foe who defies his Israel.

(See 1 Chron. 20. 4—8.)

CHAPTER XXII.

David's psalm of thanksgiving for God's deliverances and blessings.

This chapter is a psalm of praise; we find it afterwards as Psalm 18. with some little variation. The inspired historian, after having largely related David's deliverances, in this and the foregoing book, and one particularly in the close of the foregoing chapter, records this sacred poem as a memorial of all that had been before related. Some think that David penned this psalm when old, upon a general review of the mercies of his life, and the many wonderful preservations God had blessed him with, from first to last. We should, in our praises, look as far back as we can, and not suffer time to wear out the sense of God's favours. Others think he penned it when young,

upon occasion of some of his first deliverances, and kept it by him for his use afterward, and that, upon every new deliverance, his practice was to sing this song. But the book of Psalms shows that he varied as there was occasion.

Observe, 1. That it has often been the lot of God's people to have many enemies, and to be in imminent danger of falling into their hands. Let not those whom God loves, marvel if the world hate them. 2. They that trust God in the way of duty, shall find him a present help in their greatest dangers. David did so, God delivered him out of the hand of Saul, he takes special notice of that; remarkable preservations should be mentioned in our praises with a particular emphasis. He delivered him also out of the hand of all his enemies. David, from his own experience, has assured us, that though many are the troubles of the righteous, yet the Lord delivers him out of them all, *Psa.* 34. 19. We shall never be delivered from all our enemies till we get to heaven; and to that heavenly kingdom God will preserve all his, *2 Tim.* 4. 18. 3. Those who have received many signal mercies from God, ought to give him the glory. Where there is a grateful heart, out of the abundance of it the mouth will speak. David spake not to himself only, for his own pleasure, or to those about him only, for their instruction; but to the Lord, for his honour, the words of this song. In distress he cried with his voice, *Psa.* 142. 1, therefore with his voice he gave thanks. 4. We ought to be speedy in thankful returns to God. In the day that God delivered him, he sang this song. While the mercy is fresh, and we are most affected with it, let the thank-offering be brought, to be kindled with the fire of that affection.

David was himself anointed of God, not a usurper, but duly called to the government, and qualified for it, therefore he doubted not but God would show mercy to him. That mercy he had promised not to take from him, nor from his posterity, *ch.* 7. 15, 16. On that promise he depends, looking to Christ, who alone is his Seed for evermore, whose throne and kingdom still continue, and will do so to the end, whereas the seed and lineage of David are long since extinct. See *Psa.* 89. 28, 29. Thus all his joys and all his hopes terminate as all our hopes should do—in the great Redeemer.

For other remarks upon this song see *Psalm* 18. It appears to have been written after David's wars with the moabites, *ch.* 8. and before his aggravated sin.—*Chandler.*

CHAPTER XXIII.

Ver. 1—7. *David, in his last words, professes his faith in God's promises to be beyond sense or experience—The different state of the wicked.*

As many things are recorded concerning David after this, some suppose these to be the last words he spake by inspiration. But perhaps he repeated them in his dying moments, as the expression of his faith and hope, and the source of his consolations. The last words of eminent persons have often been attended to; these of David are peculiarly worthy of regard. They show that when dying, this venerable servant of God was more than ever assured of the reality and excellence of true religion, and animated with humble gratitude, and joyful expectation of his approaching happiness. When we find death near, we should endeavour to honour God, and to edify those about us, with our last words. Let those who have had long experience of God's goodness, and the pleasantness of wisdom, when they come to finish their course, leave a record of that experience, and bear their testimony to the truth of the promise.

In the introduction his humble birth and unexpected exaltation is mentioned with thankfulness. It is reckoned among the honours to which David was raised, that he was a psalmist: in that he was as truly great, as in being the anointed of the God of Jacob. It is true preferment to be serviceable to the church in acts of devotion, and instrumental to promote the blessed work of prayer and praise. Was David a prince? He was so for Jacob. Was he a psalmist? He was so for Israel. The dispensation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal, therefore, as every man has received the gift, so let him minister the same.

See here, Who spake. The Spirit of the Lord; the God of Israel, and the Rock of Israel; which, some think, is an intimation of the Trinity of persons in the Godhead. The Father, the God of Israel, the Son, the Rock of Israel, and the Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son; who spake by the prophets, and particularly by David, and whose word was, not only in his heart, but in his tongue,

for the benefit of others. David avows his Divine inspiration, that the Spirit of God spake by him. He, and other holy men, spake and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. This puts honour upon the book of Psalms, and recommends them to our use in our devotions, that they are words which the Holy Ghost teaches.

What is said, ver. 3, 4, may be considered with application to David, and his royal family. Here is the duty of magistrates and rulers. Rulers should treat men as reasonable creatures—they “must be just,” oppressing or injuring none, and restraining them from doing wrong to each other. Ruling in the fear of God, as his subjects, accountable to him, and promoting true religion. Such rulers the Lord will prosper, affording them blessings and comforts like the light of an unclouded morning sun; while, by discountenancing evil, and advancing good, they diffuse important advantages around, as the rising sun dispels the fogs and damps, and cheers the face of nature—or as his clear shining after refreshing showers, renders the earth fruitful. Also it may be taken with application to Christ, the Son of David, and then it is to be taken as a prophecy, and the original will bear this. There shall be a Ruler among men, or over men, that shall be just, and shall rule in the fear of God; shall order the affairs of religion, and Divine worship, according to his Father’s will; and he shall be as the light of the morning, for he is the Light of the world; and as the tender grass, for he is the Branch of the Lord, and the Fruit of the earth, Isa. 4. 2. Compare this with those promises of Christ, which speak of his reigning in righteousness, and being of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, Isa. 11. 1—5; 32. 1, 2; Psa. 72. 2. God, by the Spirit, gave David the foresight of this, to comfort him under the many calamities of his family, and the melancholy prospects he had of the degeneracy of his seed.

Upon the consideration of these words of God, David turned his reflections upon himself and his family, and he could not but regret that “his house was not so with God,” as described ver. 3, 4. In many things he had his own neglect and misconduct to blame; both he and Israel had suffered in consequence. But David comforted himself that “the Lord had

made with him an everlasting covenant.” By this, doubtless, he principally intended the covenant of mercy and peace, which the Lord had made with him as a sinner, who believed in the promised Saviour, who embraced the proffered blessings, who yielded up himself to the Lord to be his redeemed servant. This covenant was from everlasting in the purposes of God, and shall be to everlasting in the blessed effects of it. From age to age sinners are admitted to share its benefits in the same free and gracious manner. Believers shall for ever enjoy its blessings; and God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, shall be for ever glorified through it in their salvation. This covenant is made with the Surety, in behalf of those for whom he engaged; and all the blessings of it were purchased with his atoning blood, and freely bestowed upon all who believe in his name. Through Him, it is made with every one who applies for its blessings in the appointed way. It secures pardon, righteousness, grace, and eternal life, as the gift of God through Jesus Christ.

“It is ordered in all things, and sure.” In the Saviour is manifested the Divine holiness, the Divine justice is satisfied, the Divine law is honoured, the evil of sin is discovered. There is an infiniteness of grace and all blessings treasured up in Christ, for the supply of those who seek his salvation. A way is opened by which they may come with humble confidence. Invitations to draw near are given, and exceedingly great and precious promises to plead with God. All that is commanded is also promised; while we pray for the performance of the promise, we are enabled to obey the command, to repent, forsake sin, turn to God, and walk in newness of life. Provision is made for the forgiveness of sin, yet no encouragement to commit sin. The confidence many profess while they continue in sin, is a delusion of Satan and an abuse of God’s word. But this covenant is “so sure,” that no true believer will want wisdom, grace, or strength, sufficient for him, whatever his temptations or difficulties may be. He shall persevere in holy obedience, or be brought to deep and evident repentance; he will infallibly inherit eternal life. This covenant was “all David’s salvation”—he was so acquainted with the holy law of God and his own sinfulness, that he perceived

what was suitable to and sufficient for his own case in this salvation. It was therefore "all his desire." In comparison all earthly objects lost their attractions; he was willing to renounce or to die and leave them, that he might enjoy its full happiness, *Psa.* 73. 24—28.

David complained that matters were not with his soul, any more than with his house, as he could wish. He had received the grace of the covenant, but it had not been made "to grow" in the measure that he desired. Still the prevalence of evil, and the weakness of his faith, hope, and love, were his grief and burden. Doubtless he would have allowed that his own slackness and inattention were the cause; but the hope that it would be soon perfected in glory, animated and encouraged him in his dying moments.

God has made a covenant with the church's Head, the Son of David, that he will preserve to him a seed; that the gates of hell shall never prevail against his house. Our Saviour comforted himself in his sufferings, that the covenant with him stood firm, *Isa.* 53. 10—12.

Here is a prediction of the ruin of all the implacable enemies of Christ's kingdom. There are enemies without, that fight against it; and enemies within, that secretly betray it; both are sons of Belial, children of the wicked one, of the serpent's seed. Both are as thorns, grievous and vexatious: but both shall be so thrust away, as that Christ will set up his kingdom in despite of their enmity; will go through them, *Isa.* 27. 4, and will, in due time, bless his church with such peace, that there shall be no pricking brier, nor grieving thorn. And those that will not repent, to give glory to God, shall, in the judgment-day, to which the chaldee paraphrast refers this, be burned with unquenchable fire. See *Luke* 19. 27.

3—5. *J. P. Smith* renders these verses, "Ruling over man is a Righteous One ruling in the fear of God; Even as the light of the morning shall he arise. Jehovah, the sun, a morning without clouds for brightness, as after rain the herbage from the earth. Truly thus is my house with God, for an everlasting covenant he hath fixed with me, ordered in every thing, and secured, for this is all my salvation, and all my desire. But the wicked shall not grow," &c. The internal characters also of the passage appear irresistible proofs of its being a prophecy of the Messiah in his Divine glory, his righteous reign, the punishment of his enemies, and his showering down blessings upon the world. See *Psa.* 72.

Ver. 8—39. *A list of David's mighty men.*

These persons were the chief officers

in David's army under Joab, who, being added, completes the number, ver. 39. We read nothing elsewhere of several of them. David's reign was in many respects more splendid than appears in the sacred writings, which were intended for our instruction, not to gratify curiosity. There are several variations in the parallel passage in *Chronicles*, but not important. The titles annexed to the names generally refer to the place of their birth or abode.

We are here told how earnestly David longed for the water at the well of Bethlehem. It seems to be an instance of his weakness. He was thirsty; with the water of that well he had often refreshed himself when he was a youth, and now he inconsiderately desired it. Three of the bravest of his men, to express their attachment, broke sword in hand through the philistines, and brought him some. David was, as yet, an exile, nor was he in any capacity to prefer or reward them; yet those three were zealous for his satisfaction, firmly believing the time of recompence would come. Let us be willing to venture in the cause of Christ, even when it is a suffering cause, assured that it will prevail, and that we shall not lose thereby at last. Were they so forward to expose themselves, upon the least hint of their prince's mind, and so ambitious to please him, and shall not we covet to approve ourselves to our Lord Jesus, by ready compliance with every intimation of his will, given us by his word, Spirit, and providence? But David, upon recollection, being ashamed of his desire, poured it out as a drink-offering to the Lord. Thus he would show the tender regard he had to the lives of his soldiers, and how far he was from being prodigal of their blood, *Psa.* 72. 14. Thus he would cross his own foolish fancy, and punish himself for entertaining and indulging it, and show that he had sober thoughts to correct his rash ones, and knew how to deny himself even in that of which he was fond. Thus he would honour God, and give glory to him; the water purchased at this rate, he thought too precious for his own drinking, and fit only to be poured out to God as a drink-offering. If it was the blood of these men, it was God's due, for the blood was always his.

Did David look upon that water as very precious, which was got at the hazard of

these men's blood, and shall not we much more value those benefits, for the purchasing of which our blessed Saviour shed his blood? Let us not undervalue the blood of the covenant, as they do that undervalue the blessings of the covenant. Were we as attached to the person and cause of the Captain of our salvation, and as much pleased to show our love and gratitude towards him, as some soldiers have been to a beloved prince, how ready should we be for every service, and how glad to lay down our lives for his glory! The blessings the Captain of our salvation freely bestows, are beyond all earthly computation. They were dearly purchased by him, and for us, when rebels and enemies! The names and services of his followers are recorded in the book of life; not a cup of cold water, given for his sake, shall be unrewarded—yea, the mind willing to suffer for him shall be accepted, as if we had shed our blood in his cause. But as he has actually shed his blood for sinners, let all beware of neglecting so great salvation.

(See 1 Chron. 12. for further remarks.)

Chandler considers that the bringing water from the well of Bethlehem, and the other exploits of David's worthies here recorded, took place during his wars with the philistines, mentioned ch. 5.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Ver. 1—9. *David, tempted by Satan, forces Joab to number the people.*

The israelites offended the Lord by their repeated rebellions and general sinfulness. They had not profited by his corrections, and, as we are told, 1 Chron. 21. 1, Satan provoked David to number Israel. It is said to be of the Lord, because he withdrew every restraint, and left him to follow his own counsels and Satan's suggestions. This manner of expression is common in scripture, though the sinful dispositions could not be from God; but he permitted them, and overruled them to accomplish his own wise and righteous purposes. For the people's sin David was left to act wrong, and in his chastisement they received punishment. This example throws light upon the doctrine of God's providential government of the world, and furnishes many practical instructions.

The pride of David's heart constituted his sin in numbering of the people. It induced him to the measure, and rendered

it so displeasing to the Lord. Elated with prosperity and the extent of his dominions, he wished that the number of his subjects capable of bearing arms might be known. It was a proud confidence in his own strength. He thought thereby to appear the more formidable, trusting in an arm of flesh more than he should have done, who had written so much of trusting in God only. God judges not of sin as we do. What appears to us harmless, or, at least, but a small offence, may be a great sin in the eye of God, who sees men's principles, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. But his judgment, we are sure, is according to truth. Joab was aware of David's folly and vain-glory in this design. Even ungodly men can discern evil tempers and unbecoming conduct in believers, of which they themselves often remain unconscious. Why should David, who speaks so much of delighting in God, and the exercises of devotion, take pleasure in a thing of this nature? Many things, not in themselves sinful, turn into sin to us, by our inordinate delighting in them. Whether the numbers answered David's expectation we are not told, nor whether the account fed his pride or mortified it. But God seldom allows to those whom he loves the satisfactions which they sinfully covet.

9. The jews were many, but they had not increased in Canaan as they had in Egypt, nor were much more than double to what they were when they came into Canaan under Joshua, about 400 years before; yet it is evident that Canaan was a very fruitful land, as so many thousands were maintained in so narrow a compass.

As to the numbers, see note 1 Chron. 22. 6.

Ver. 10—15. *David chooseth the pestilence as the Divine judgment for his sin.*

David was convinced of his sin; his heart smote him before the prophet came to him; (it should not be read "for," ver. 11, but "and;") his conscience showed him the evil of what he had done. That appeared exceeding sinful, which at first he saw no harm in. It is well, when a man has sinned, to have a heart within him to smite him for it. David cries to God for pardon; I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant. If we confess our sins, we may pray in faith that God would forgive them, and take away, by pardoning mercy, that iniquity which we cast away by sincere repentance. But David must be corrected for his fault; it is too great

a crime, and reflects too much dishonour upon God, to go unpunished, even in David himself. Of the things that God hates, pride is the first, Prov. 6. 17. Those who truly repent of their sins, and have them pardoned, yet are often made to smart for them in this world. The punishment must answer to the sin. He was proud of the numbers of his people, therefore the judgment he must be chastised with for this sin, must be such as will make them fewer. What we make the matter of our pride, it is just with God to take from us, or imbitter to us, and to make it the matter of our punishment. It must be such a punishment as the people have a large share in, for God's anger was kindled against Israel, ver. 1. Though it was David's sin that opened the sluice, the sins of the people all contributed to the deluge.

David is bid to choose the punishment. In this distressing difficulty, David preferred a judgment which came immediately from God, whose mercies he knew to be very great, rather than those wherein men were concerned, who would have triumphed in the miseries of Israel, and have been thereby hardened in their idolatry. He chose the pestilence—he and his family would be as much exposed to it as the poorest israelite, and he would continue for a shorter time under the Divine rebuke, however severe it was. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, Heb. 10. 31; fearful indeed for sinners that have, by their impenitence, shut themselves out from all hope of mercy; but David, as a penitent, dares cast himself into God's hand, knowing he shall find that his mercies are great. Good men, even when they are under God's frowns, yet will entertain no other than good thoughts of him; Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him, Job 13. 15.

A pestilence was, accordingly, sent from one end of the kingdom to the other, which shows it came immediately from God's hand, and not from any natural causes. It lasted from morning, the very morning on which it was put to David's choice, to the time appointed, that is, to the third day, so Poole; or only to the evening of the first day, the time appointed for the evening sacrifice, so Patrick and others, who reckon that the pestilence lasted but nine hours, and that, in compassion to David, God shortened

the time he had first mentioned. The execution the pestilence did was very severe; there died seventy thousand men, who were all well, and sick, and dead in a few hours! See how easily God can bring down the proudest sinners, and how much we owe daily to the Divine patience.

Ver. 16, 17. *The staying of the pestilence.*

God graciously relaxed the judgment, when it began to be inflicted upon Jerusalem. The angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem, as if he intended to do greater execution there than any where else, even to destroy it. Perhaps there was more wickedness, especially more pride, and that was the sin now chastised, in Jerusalem than elsewhere, therefore the hand of the destroyer is stretched out upon that city; but then the Lord repented him of the evil, changed not his mind, but his way. Jerusalem shall be spared for the ark's sake, for it is the place God hath chosen to put his name there. See how ready God is to forgive, and let it encourage us to meet him by repentance in the way of his judgments. This was on mount Moriah. Lightfoot observes, that in the very place where Abraham was stayed from slaying his son, this angel, by a like countermand, was stayed from destroying Jerusalem. It is for the sake of the great Sacrifice that our forfeited lives are preserved from the destroying angel.

This angel, who appeared to David, and probably to the elders, for he appeared to Araunah and his sons, and commissioned Gad to command David to erect an altar to the Lord in the threshing-floor of Ornan, on mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared to David, 2 Chron. 3. 1, seems to have been the same that appeared to Joshua as Captain of the Lord's host, to remind David of the true defender of his empire, his "Strength," and who, upon this occasion, under the Divine mercy and forgiveness, became his Redeemer also.—(35.)

David criminated himself: I am the sinner, let me be the sufferer; so willing was he to accept the punishment of his iniquity. He interceded for the people. Their sin provoked God to leave David to himself, yet, as became a penitent, he was severe upon his own faults, while he extenuated theirs. Most people, when God's judgments are abroad, charge others with being the cause, and care not who falls by them, so they can escape;

but David's penitent and public spirit was otherwise affected. Let this remind us of the grace of our Lord Jesus, who gave himself for our sins, and was willing that God's hand should be against him, that we might escape. The Shepherd was smitten, that the sheep might be spared.

Here is the language and spirit of a true shepherd of the people, devoting himself and his family as a sacrifice to God for the salvation of his subjects.—(13.)

Ver. 18—25. David purchases Araunah's threshing-floor, and sacrifices there—The plague removed.

God's encouraging us to offer to him spiritual sacrifices is evidence of his reconciling us to himself. Peace is made between God and sinners by sacrifice, and not otherwise, even by Christ the great Propitiation, of whom all the legal sacrifices were types. For his sake, the destroying angel is bid to stay his hand. When God's judgments are graciously stayed, we ought to acknowledge it: see Isa. 12. 1. David purchased the ground to rear the altar. God hates robbery for burnt-offering. See his humility; though a king, in token of his self-abasement, he went to Araunah. Araunah, when he saw him, went and bowed to the ground before him. Great men will be the more respected for their humility. David resolves to pay the full value, and does so. Araunah is willing to give; but David is

determined to buy; and for a good reason—he will not offer that to God which cost him nothing. He would not take advantage of the pious jebusite's generosity. Those know not what religion is, who chiefly care to make it cheap and easy to themselves, and who are best pleased with that which costs them least pains or money. For what have we our substance, but to honour God with it; and how can it be better bestowed? Upon this spot, bought of a gentile, the temple was built soon after.

See the building the altar, and the offering proper sacrifices upon it. Burnt-offerings to the glory of God's justice; peace-offerings to the glory of his mercy. Christ is our Altar, our Sacrifice; in him alone we may expect to find favour with God, to escape his wrath. And death is destroying all around in so many forms, and so suddenly, that it is madness not to be expecting and preparing for the closing scene. Through the great sacrifice and intercession of the Saviour, the vilest sinner may approach a reconciled God; and, being justified by faith in his blood, may become his servant and child, and be made meet for his eternal kingdom.

(See also remarks on 1 Chron. 21. which chapter contains additional particulars.)

18. The threshing-floors in the east, to this day, are round, level plots of ground, in the open air, where the corn is trodden out by oxen.

(Read here 1 Chron. 22.)

ON THE CHARACTER OF DAVID.

SOME further remarks appear desirable on the character of David in general, but especially as to an expression upon which many have remarked very unfairly, namely, that David was a man after God's own heart, 1 Sam. 13. 14. The views of various writers may be here noticed.

Chandler considers that this expression is used in opposition to the character and conduct of Saul. It means one who should act prudently, and obey the commandments of God delivered him by his prophets, and whom, therefore, God would thus far approve and continue to favour. Thus the expression is interpreted by Paul, Acts 13. 22, "I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, *who shall execute my will.*" *Chandler* cites many places of scripture to confirm this, and adds, "David certainly was

a wise, just, munificent, and prosperous prince; but he had faults, and those great ones, in his private character. These faults, however, were not inconsistent with his character of being 'a man according to God's heart.' For, if he was such a prince as God intended him to be, by faithfully executing his orders, and bringing to pass those great events, which he was raised up by God to be the instrument of accomplishing, he thus far acted 'according to the heart,' that is, *the purpose and will* 'of God,' and thereby, in this respect, rendered himself well pleasing and acceptable to him." The particular purposes for which God advanced David to the throne, were, 1. That by his steady adherence to the one true God, and the religion which He established by Moses, David might be an

illustrious example to all that should reign after him. 2. To save his people out of the hand of the philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies, accomplishing the promise, Gen. 15. 18. 3. To exalt the glory of his people Israel, and render them a flourishing and happy people by the wisdom and justice of his government. —All the pleasure of God, in these great instances, he faithfully performed. He was, therefore, “a man after God’s own heart,” in the proper original sense of the expression.

Poole’s view of 1 Sam. 13. 14, is, “Such a man as I desire, one who will fulfil all the desires of my heart, and not oppose them as thou (that is, Saul) dost.” The vain cavils of infidels appear to have arisen from their not considering that the phrase to which they object may be interpreted, with equal propriety, as referring to the Divine purpose, design, or intention, as to designate peculiar favour and affection. The latter undoubtedly was true, yet the former is most clearly the meaning intended here. Surely we may learn hence how God overrules all things to his own praise.

We admire the exceeding grace of God, in David’s spiritual attainments; when we consider the depth of his contrition, the strength of his faith, the fervour of his love, the activity of his obedience, we do not fear to assert, that, in this sense, “he found favour before God, and was a man after his own heart.”—*Robinson*.

Too true and sad it is that David fell, with all the aggravations of accumulated guilt. He stands an alarming memento of the frailty of man in his best estate. Excuse there can be none. However strong temptations are, we have, or may have power to resist them. Greater are they that are with us, than those that are against us. But view his behaviour afterwards. What was his anguish! how deep his sorrow! how sincere his repentance! His penitence was deep, lasting, and exemplary. Sincere we may be sure it was, for God forgave him. True sorrow consists in a deep grief that we have erred, with continual recollection of our fault, with a future fear of ourselves, and a return to every duty with double assiduity. Such will be the repentance of every good man, such was the repentance of David. He returned from his fall to the most diligent performance of his duties, and though he felt he was forgiven by God, he could

scarcely forgive himself. He occasionally bursts out into condemnation of himself, and grief at times overpowers his soul. He continues to the end of his days serving God, and doing his duty to God and man. Never was repentance more severe, or sorrow more sincere; so that he may justly be said (his repentance included, though not his fall) to be a man after God’s own heart.—*Yonge*.

The fall of David is one of the most instructive and alarming recorded in that most faithful and impartial of all histories, the Holy Bible. The transgression of one idle unguarded moment, pierced him through with many sorrows, imbibited the remainder of his life, and gave occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, on account of this crying offence of the man after God’s own heart. The rising again of David affords no encouragement to sinners who may wish to shelter themselves under his example, or flatter themselves with the hope of obtaining forgiveness. The remainder of his days was as disastrous as the beginning had been prosperous. Rape, incest, murder, and rebellion, raged among his children; he was deserted by his friends, reviled by his enemies, banished from his capital, and plunged into the deepest affliction by the ingratitude and death of his favourite and rebellious son, Absalom; and to fill up the measure of his calamities, by a dreadful plague brought upon his subjects, by his last offence; so that he died exhausted at the age of seventy, still older in constitution than he was in years.—*Hales*.

David, in his personal character, is vastly superior to any one hero of all antiquity. It is indeed a mixed character, and where is the character that is not so? Is it fair to consider David only in the light of guilt? or should he, in common justice, be estimated as all men are, by the main of his life? Millions have fallen, have sinned, as David did; but who ever repented and recovered like him? Revolve his whole life before the matter of Uriah; it is almost one train of wise, generous, pious, and valiant conduct. Revolve his whole life from the hour of this guilt, and it is little else than one train of humiliation and repentance before God, and this, too, after assurance of pardon from God himself, by his prophet. Or, if he varied his conduct, it was only from penance to praise; to turn all his thoughts



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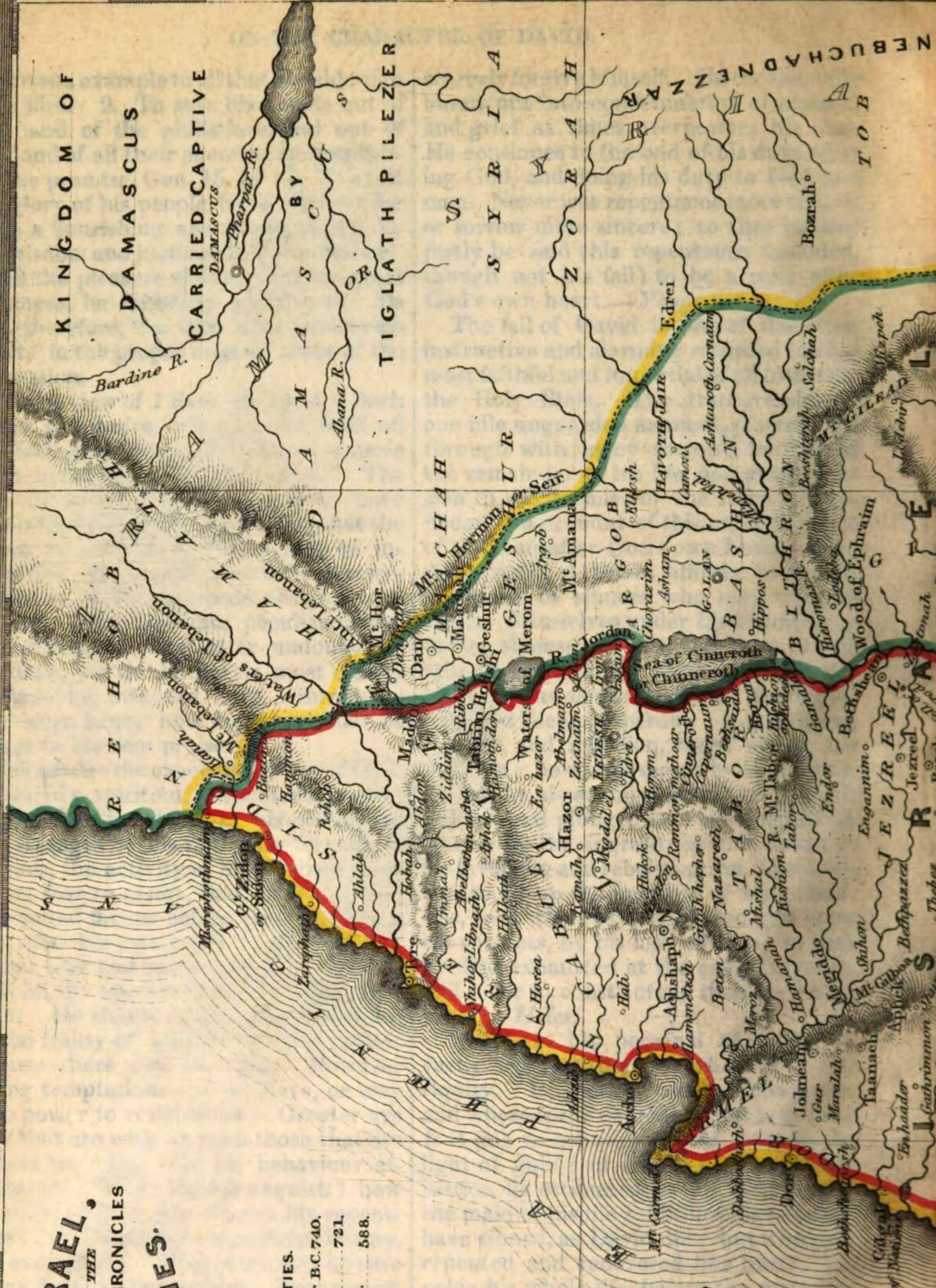
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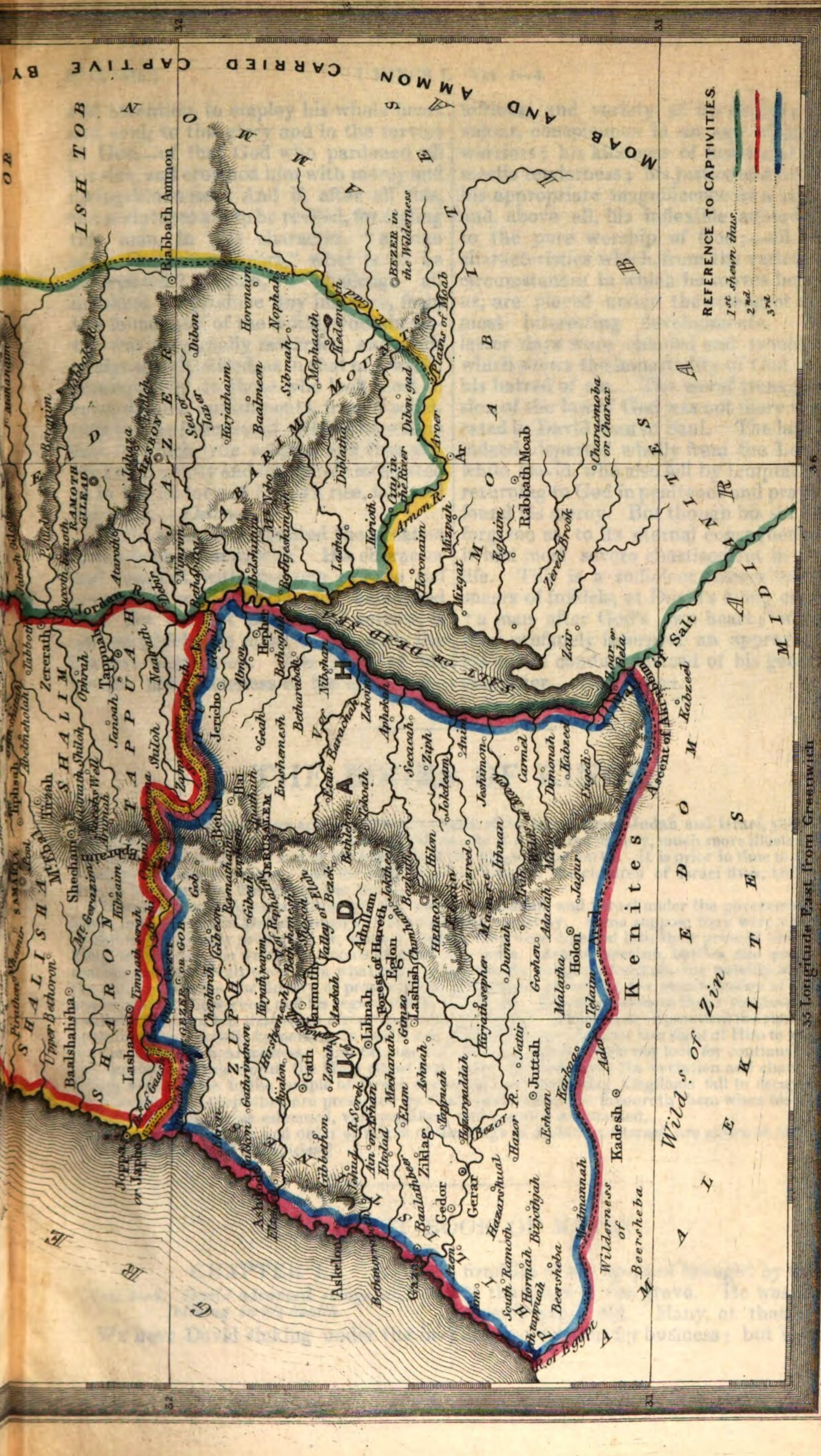
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JUDAH & ISRAEL. ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE **BOOKS OF KINGS & CHRONICLES** AND THE **CAPTIVITIES.**

DATES OF CAPTIVITIES.

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35 Longitude East from Greenwich

Hand-drawn map of the Middle East, showing the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf. The map is oriented with North at the top. The title 'JUDAN A ISRAEL' is written in the upper left corner. The word 'CAPTIVITY' is written in the lower left corner. The map shows the borders of the Kingdom of Judah and the Kingdom of Israel, with various cities and towns marked. The Mediterranean Sea is labeled 'MEDITERRANEAN SEA' and the Red Sea is labeled 'RED SEA'. The Persian Gulf is labeled 'PERSIAN GULF'. The map is drawn in a simple, hand-drawn style, with lines representing the borders and wavy lines representing the sea. The text is written in a cursive, handwritten style.

JUDAN A ISRAEL

CAPTIVITY

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and attention, to employ his whole heart and soul, to the glory and in the service of God—of that God who pardoned all his sins, and crowned him with mercy and loving-kindness. And if, after all this, the scriptures are to be reviled, for styling this man, in this character, “a man after God’s own heart,” what is to be revered?—Again, I challenge all mankind to produce any instance, from the foundation of the world, wherein virtue was so signally rewarded, and guilt so signally chastised, as in that of David; consequently, to those who look most to rewards and punishments, from a solicitude for the interests of virtue, there is no case in which true religion and true virtue are so nearly and intimately interested as in the history of David’s rise, fall, and recovery.—*Delany.*

David is to be accounted the greatest of the hebrew monarchs. His character and conduct, with the one or two sad exceptions which he himself bemoaned with the deepest penitential sorrow, is one on which the mind dwells with the highest admiration. The piety of his youth; the nobleness of his spirit; the

loftiness and variety of his genius; his valour, conspicuous in an age of great warriors; his kindness of heart and domestic tenderness; his justice as a ruler; his appropriate magnificence as a king; and, above all, his inflexible adherence to the pure worship of God;—all are characteristics which, from the variety of circumstances in which he moves before us, are placed under the strongest and most interesting developments. His latter days were clouded and troubled, which shows the impartiality of God, and his hatred of sin. The *moral* transgression of the law of God was not more tolerated in David than in Saul. The latter, indeed, departed wholly from the Lord; while David, who also fell by temptation, returning to God in penitence and prayer, found his mercy. But though his sin was forgiven as to its eternal consequences, it had most severe chastisement in this life. This is a sufficient answer to the sneers of infidels, at David’s being called “a man after God’s own heart;” which they profanely interpret an approval of his entire conduct instead of his general character.—*R. Watson.*

THE BOOKS OF KINGS.

The history now before us accounts for the affairs of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, yet with special regard to the kingdom of God among them; for it is a sacred history, much more illustrative and more interesting than any of the histories of the kings of the earth. It is prior in time to those which are of any certainty; and the history of the kings of the children of Israel lives, and will live, in holy writ to the end of the world.

These books contain an abstract of the history of Judah and Israel under the government of kings from the end of David’s reign to the babylonish captivity. Some suppose they were written by the contemporary prophets; or, more probably, they were digested into their present order by Ezra, from those who wrote the annals of their own times. Acts of heroism, battles, and political matters, are less dwelt upon than what regards the temple, religious festivals, the worship of God, the piety of princes, the fidelity of prophets, the punishment of crimes, the manifestation of God’s anger against the wicked, and his regard for the righteous. The whole evinces that “righteousness exalteth a nation, but that sin is a reproach to any people.” Abundance of practical instruction is contained therein, both for persons in public and private life, nor shall we lose sight of Him to whom all the scriptures bear witness. And because the children of God should not look for continual rest and quietness in this world, the Holy Ghost here sets before our eyes the variation and change of things which came to the people of Israel, declaring how flourishing kingdoms fall to decay and come to nought, except they are preserved by God’s protection, who favoureth them when his word is truly set forth, virtue esteemed, vice punished, and concord maintained.

[The particular dates and order of reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel are given at the end of the second book of Chronicles.]

THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1—4. *David advanced in age, and declining in his health.*

WE have David sinking under the in-

firmities of old age, and brought by them to the gates of the grave. He was now seventy years old. Many, at that age, are lively and fit for business; but David

was chastised for his recent sins, and felt the effects of his former toils and hardships. What our hand finds to do for God, and our souls, and our generation, let us do with all our might, because the night comes, the night of old age, in which no man can work; when our strength is gone, it will be a comfort to remember that we used it well.

The counsel of his physicians deserves censure. Advice is often enforced under specious pretexts, whereby persons are induced to actions inconsistent with their character and professions. But Abishag was David's secondary wife, as appears from its being a crime in Adonijah, that he desired to marry her after his father's death.

2, 4. "Cherish." The hebrew word denotes to nurse, to take care of.—*Holden*.

Ver. 5—10. *Adonijah aspires to the throne.*

Indulgent parents are often chastised with disobedient children, who ungratefully despise their infirmities, and are anxious to possess their estates. They who honour their sons more than God, as those who keep them not under good discipline, thereby forfeit the honour they might expect from their sons. Adonijah could not be ignorant that Solomon had been appointed by the Lord to succeed David in the kingdom; and his inviting all his brethren except Solomon, shows that he considered him alone as his rival. He was next in age to Absalom. It is remarkable how frequently the first-born were set aside by the express appointment of God.

Adonijah made great interest with Joab, the general of the army, and Abiathar the high priest. No worldly wisdom, no experience or sacredness of character, can insure the continuance in any former course, of those who remain under the power of self-love. But we may well wonder by what arts they could be drawn to follow and help Adonijah. They were old men, who had been faithful to David, in his most difficult and troublesome times; men of sense and experience. God, in this matter, left them to themselves, to correct them for former misconduct with a scourge of their own making. We are told who were of such approved fidelity to David, that Adonijah dared not so much as to propose it to them—Zadok, Benaiah, and Nathan. A man who has given proofs of his resolute adherence to that which is good, shall not be asked to

do a bad thing. Enrobel was not far from Jerusalem. A feast, or a sacrifice, are suitable baits to draw in the sensual or the unsuspecting. Aspiring men, according to the taste of the times, have employed the one or the other to serve their own ends.

Ver. 11—31. *David makes Solomon king.*

We have here the effectual endeavours used by Nathan and Bathsheba, to obtain from David a ratification of Solomon's succession, for crushing Adonijah's usurpation. Nathan the prophet was concerned, because he knew God's mind, and David's and Israel's interest. By him God had named Solomon Jedidiah, 2 Sam. 12. 25, and he could not sit still and see the throne usurped, which he knew was Solomon's right. When crowns were disposed of by immediate direction from Heaven, no marvel that prophets were much interested and employed; but now that common providence rules the affairs of the kingdom of men, Dan. 4. 32, the subordinate agency must be left to common persons. Let not prophets intermeddle in them, but keep to the affairs of the kingdom of God among men. Yet when inattention, multiplied engagements, or infirmities, cause neglect of duty, every proper means should be used to bring to remembrance, to prevent injustice, to exclude occasions of discord, and to promote decisive measures for the glory of God and the good of his people. The friends of religion should not be timid, indifferent, or disunited.

Observe Nathan's address to Bathsheba. Let me give thee counsel how to save thy own life, and the life of thy son, ver. 12. Such as this is the counsel Christ's ministers give us in his name, to give all diligence, not only that no man take our crown, Rev. 3. 11, but that we save our lives, even the lives of our souls.

David made a solemn declaration of his firm adherence to his former resolution, that Solomon should be his successor. He repeats his former promise with an oath, which he used on solemn occasions. It expresses a grateful acknowledgment of the goodness of God to him. Thus setting to his seal, from his own experience, that it was true which the Lord spake by him, Psa. 34. 22, The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants. The true believer loves to review his past experience. Even the recollection of distresses from which the Lord redeemed

him, increases his comfort, inspires his hopes, and animates to his duty, even under the decays of nature and the approach of death.

Ver. 32—40. *Solomon is anointed king, and the people triumph.*

We have here the effectual care David took, to secure Solomon's right, and to preserve the public peace, by crushing Adonijah's project. This unction was typical of the designation and qualification of the Messiah, or Christ, the anointed One, on whom the Spirit, that oil of gladness, was poured without measure, Heb. 1. 9; Psalms 89. 20. Christ signifies Anointed, and he is the King whom God hath set upon his holy hill of Sion, according to the decree, Psalm 2. 6, 7. Christians also are made to our God, and by Him, kings, and they have an unction from the Holy One, 1 John 2. 20. The people expressed great joy and satisfaction in the elevation of Solomon. Every true Israelite rejoices in the exaltation of the Son of David.

33. Gihon, or Siloa, was a stream on the west of Jerusalem; Enrogel was a fountain or pool on the east of the city.

Ver. 41—53. *Adonijah's usurpation stopped, and his party dispersed.*

Enterprises must terminate well which are conducted with piety and integrity, in simple dependence on God, and cordial acquiescence in his will. Combinations formed upon evil principles will soon be dissolved, when self-preservation or self-interest calls another way. The long feast of Adonijah and his party intimates that they were secure and confident, else they would not have lost so much time. The old world and Sodom were eating and drinking, secure and sensual, when their destruction came, Luke 17. 26, &c. How can those who do evil deeds expect to have good tidings? The triumphing of the wicked is short. They were building a castle in the air, which, having no foundation, would soon fall, and crush them. Adonijah soon was as much depressed as he had been elevated; he had despised Solomon, but he dreads him as his judge; he feared because of Solomon. Thus they who oppose Christ and his kingdom will shortly be made to tremble before him, and call in vain to rocks and mountains to shelter them from his wrath. He took hold on the horns of the altar, which was always regarded as a sanctuary, or place

of refuge, Exodus 21. 14; intimating, that he threw himself upon the mercy of his prince, in suing for which he relied upon no other plea than the mercy of God, manifested in the institution and acceptance of the sacrifices that were offered on that altar, and the remission of sin thereupon. Solomon considers Adonijah as his brother. If he will conduct himself well for the future, what is past shall be pardoned; but if he be found disaffected, turbulent, and aspiring, this offence shall be remembered, and execution shall be awarded against him. Thus the Son of David receives the rebellious to mercy. If they return to their allegiance, their former crimes shall not be mentioned against them; but if they continue in the interests of the world and the flesh, that will be their ruin.

We see here, as in a glass, Jesus the Son of David and the Son of God, exalted to the throne of glory, notwithstanding all his enemies. His kingdom is far greater than that of his father David, and therein all the true people of God cordially rejoice. The prosperity of his cause is vexation and terror to his enemies. No horns of the altar, no forms of godliness, no pretences to religion, can profit those who will not submit to his authority, and accept of his salvation; and if their professed submission be hypocritical, they shall at length die without mercy, and perish without remedy.

(1 Chron. 23. to 29. may be read here, as containing many additional particulars relative to David.)

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1—4. *David's dying charge to Solomon that he serve God.*

Solomon was not at this time more than twenty years of age, an early period for him to enter upon so weighty a charge as the government of God's people. But he was endowed with extraordinary wisdom, and David exhorted him to show, that though young in years, he was old in capacity for business, and attention to it. David's charge to Solomon is, to keep the charge of the Lord his God. The authority of a dying father is much, but nothing to that of a living God. Be strong; those that would keep the charge of the Lord their God, must be resolute. Let each, in his own age, keep God's charge, and God will be sure to continue

his word. We never let fall the promise, till we let fall the precept. God promised David that the Messiah should come from his descendants, and that promise was absolute; but the promise, that there should not fail of them a man on the throne of Israel, was conditional; if his seed behave themselves as they should do. The condition is, that he walk before God in all his institutions, in sincerity, with zeal and resolution; in order hereunto, that he take heed to his way. In order to constancy in religion, caution and circumspection are most needful.

Ver. 5—11. *David's dying charge concerning Joab, Barzillai, and Shimei; and his death.*

These dying counsels concerning Joab and Shimei must not be imputed to personal resentment, but to a wise and pious regard for the security of Solomon's throne, which was the cause of God and of Israel. Joab had long before deserved to die, and David's timidity had left blood-guiltiness upon his family and kingdom. Joab's late conspiracy proved that it was not probable Solomon would remain in peace while he lived. It was evident that Joab did not repent of the murders he had committed, but would readily repeat them to carry any purpose. Though he has been long reprieved, he shall be reckoned with at last; time does not wear out the guilt of any sin, and particularly of murder.

When David, upon his death-bed, was remembering the injuries that had been done, he could not forget the kindnesses that had been shown, but leaves it as a charge upon his son to return them, as to Barzillai and his family. The kindnesses we have received from our friends, must not be buried, either in their graves or in ours, our children must return them to theirs, Prov. 27. 10.

Concerning Shimei, David had sworn to him, that he would not put him to death, because he seasonably submitted. David was not willing to use the sword of public justice for avenging wrongs done to himself. But this case, as it now stands, is left with Solomon. "Hold him not guiltless;" do not think him any true friend to thee or thy government, or fit to be trusted; he has no less malice now than he had then. His turbulent spirit will soon give occasion for bringing his "hoary head to the grave with blood." This proceeded not from personal revenge. Even a hoary head, if a guilty

and forfeited head, ought not to be any man's protection from justice.

If we would form a fair opinion of David in the close of his life, his dying sentiments are recorded, as delivered under the immediate and powerful influence of the Holy Ghost, 2 Sam. 23. 1—7. The Lord had given him the clearest information, discovering to him the dignity, the offices, and the salvation of that glorious personage, the Messiah, whose coming he then foretold, and from whom he professed to derive all his comforts and expectations. From that passage we have a decided proof that he died under the influence of the Holy Ghost, in the exercise of faith and hope. To such cases we are not afraid to appeal for a full attestation of the reality and excellency of religion. "After he had served his own generation by the will of God, he fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers and saw corruption," Acts 13. 36. His end was in peace. He closed his day of labour with composure and serenity, just as the wearied go to rest.—(60.)

(See also remarks, 1 Chron. 29.)

11. In the close of his life, and in the near prospect of death, to demonstrate his love of justice, David charges Solomon to punish Joab with death, for the base murder of two men whom he assassinated under pretence of peace and friendship: and to manifest his care for his successor's safety, he charges him to observe the conduct of a turbulent rebel, and except cutting him off, to deal with him according to his prudence, and not to spare him if he found in him any thing worthy of death.—*Chandler.*

David did not advise Solomon to put Joab to death absolutely or unconditionally. "Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoary head go down to the grave in peace."—That is, Though you have now pardoned Joab through policy, and as I was compelled to do myself, by the exigency of the times, and the predominate influence of the sons of Zeruiah; yet, should he offend again, act according to your discretion, and then punish him as a hoary murderer, and confirmed traitor, with death.—*Hales.*

Ver. 12—25. *Solomon reigns—Adonijah, again aspiring to the throne, put to death.*

Adonijah intimated a claim to the kingdom, as his birthright, and that he had the consent of the people. His language discovered that he had not given up his pretensions, but was forming new designs of obtaining the kingdom. He imagined the possession of Abishag would forward his success. But Solomon immediately saw Adonijah's intentions, that he considered this a step to the throne, and that Joab and Abiathar were concerned. Bathsheba promised to speak to the king

for him, and did so. Solomon received her with all the respect that was owing to a mother; but let not princes be asked for that which they ought not to grant. It ill becomes a good man to prefer a bad request, or appear in a bad cause. It was plain that Adonijah aimed at the crown, and Solomon could not be safe while he lived. Ambitious, turbulent spirits commonly prepare for themselves the instruments of death. Many a head has been lost by catching at a crown.

Ver. 26—34. *Abiathar banished—Joab put to death.*

Solomon's words to Abiathar, and his silence, imply that some recent conspiracies had been entered into. Abiathar and Joab, it is probable, were concerned in this new motion. Both are guilty of treason, but in the judgment a difference is made, with good reason. Abiathar, in consideration of his old services, is only degraded. Solomon calls to mind the respect shown to David his father, that he had ministered to him in holy things, and tenderly sympathized in his afflictions. Those that show kindness to God's people shall have it remembered to their advantage. For this reason Solomon spares Abiathar's life, but deposes him from his offices. The depriving of Abiathar was the fulfilling of the threatening against the house of Eli, 1 Sam. 2. 30, for he was the last high priest of that family. Joab was worthy of death for turning after Adonijah; yet Joab had merited well of the house of David; and Solomon would have pardoned his offence against himself, but he must die for the murders of which he had formerly been guilty. Solomon knew the law, that the altar of God should give no protection to wilful murderers, Exod. 21. 14, Thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die, may die a sacrifice. In case of such sins as the blood of beasts would atone for, the altar was a refuge, but not in Joab's case. Solomon, therefore, ordered him to be executed there, if he could not be got thence, to show that he feared not the censure of the people in doing his duty, but would let them know that the administration of justice is better than sacrifice, and that the holiness of any place should never countenance the wickedness of any person. Those who, by a lively faith, take hold on Christ and his righteousness, with a resolution, if they perish, to perish there, shall find

in him a more powerful protection than Joab found at the horns of the altar. Benaiah slew him with the solemnity of a public execution.

Solomon, in this blessing of peace upon his house and throne, piously looks upward to God as the Author of it, and forward to eternity as the perfection of it; "It shall be peace from the Lord, and peace for ever from the Lord." The Lord of peace himself gives us that peace which is everlasting.

Ver. 35—46. *Benaiah and Zadok preferred—Shimei is put to death.*

Here is the preferment of Benaiah and Zadok, two faithful friends to Solomon and his government. Solomon had cause to suspect that Shimei's influence would be dangerous among his dependents; he therefore proposed, as the indemnity for former crimes, that he should live in Jerusalem, and by no means remove thence. These terms Shimei readily agreed to. For three years he lived at ease; but, growing secure, in contempt of Solomon's authority and his own oath, according to his own engagement, he forfeited his life. The old malignity remains in the unconverted heart, and a watchful eye should be kept on those who have manifested their enmity, but have given no evidence of repentance. Yet it is well to show such impartiality that they must allow "the saying is good." But no engagements or dangers will restrain worldly men from their pursuits; they will go on though they forfeit their lives and souls.

And let us remember, God will not accommodate his judgment to ours. Let us seek to bear in mind that his eye is over us; and let us strive to walk as in his immediate presence. Let our every act, word, and thought, be regulated by the consideration, that the hour is quickly coming when the minutest circumstances of our lives shall be brought to light, and our eternal state fixed by a righteous and unerring God.—(61.)

Thus the Lord left Shimei to be infatuated, that due punishment might be inflicted upon him, so that every opposer of Solomon's kingdom might be crushed, and all others intimidated by their examples. His throne was established in peace, as the type of the Redeemer's kingdom of peace and righteousness.

And it is a comfort, in reference to the enmity of the church's enemies, that, how much soever they rage, it is a vain thing

they imagine : Christ's throne is established, and they cannot shake it.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1—4. *Solomon's marriage with Pharaoh's daughter—A general view of his religion.*

Pharaoh's daughter, it is supposed, was proselyted, else this marriage had not been lawful ; yet surely it was not advisable. He that loved the Lord, should, for his sake, have fixed his love upon one of the Lord's people. Matches of the sons of God with the daughters of men, are of pernicious consequence.

Whatever distinctions any man may possess, the greatest is "to love the Lord." Solomon was a wise man, a rich man, a great man ; yet the brightest praise of him, is that which is the character of all the saints, even the poorest, "He loved the Lord." He loved the worship of the Lord, so the chaldee. All that love God, love his worship, love to hear from him, and speak to him, and so to have communion with him. He offered sacrifice in some proportion to his great wealth. Where God sows plentifully, he expects to reap accordingly ; and those that truly love God and his worship, will not grudge the expenses of their religion. We must never think that wasted, which is laid out in the service of God.

1. Some think that Pharaoh's daughter was a sincere convert, (for the gods of the Egyptians were not reckoned among the strange gods, which Solomon's wives drew him to worship, ch. 11. 5, 6,) and that the book of Canticles, and the 45th Psalm, were penned on this occasion ; be which these nuptials were made typical of the mystical espousals of the church to Christ, especially the gentile church.—*Henry*. But this is doubtful.

Ver. 5—15. *Solomon's vision—His prayer for wisdom.*

Solomon's dream was not an ordinary one. In this way, God used to speak to the prophets, Numb. 12. 6, and to private persons, for their own benefit, Job 33. 15, 16. These Divine dreams distinguished themselves from those in which there are divers vanities, Eccl. 5. 7. While his bodily powers were locked up in sleep, the powers of his soul were strengthened in a supernatural manner ; he was enabled to receive the Divine vision, and to make a suitable choice. Doubtless this sentiment was in Solomon's mind before he had this vision ; feeling his own insufficiency had led him to depend upon the Lord to qualify him for

the duties of his station. Absalom and Adonijah had no anxiety on this account ; they sought the honour and power of the kingdom. Solomon desired to discharge the duty of a king. He saw the glory of God shine about him, and heard a voice saying, Ask what I shall give thee. Not that God was indebted to him for his sacrifices, but thus would testify acceptance of them, and signify the great mercy in store for him. Thus he would try his inclinations, and put honour upon the prayer of faith. God, in like manner, condescends and puts us in the ready way to be happy, by assuring us we shall have what we need, for the asking, John 16. 23 ; 1 John 5. 15. What would we more than, Ask, and it shall be given you?

Solomon's making such an intelligent choice as this, when asleep, and the powers of reason least active, showed it came from the grace of God, which wrought in him gracious desires. He speaks honourably of his father's piety. We may hope that those who praise their godly parents, will imitate them. But he speaks more honourably of God's goodness to his father. Children should give God thanks for his mercies to their parents ; for the sure mercies of David. He owns his insufficiency for the discharge of that great trust to which he was called. As one that had a humble sense of his own deficiency, he pleads, Lord, I am but a little child ; so he calls himself a child in understanding, though his father called him a wise man, ch. 2. 9.

Those employed in public stations, ought to be sensible of the weight and importance of their work, and their own insufficiency ; and then seek Divine instruction. The more wise and considerate men are, the better acquainted they are with their own weakness, and the more jealous of themselves. Solomon begs of God to give him wisdom. An understanding heart is God's gift, Prov. 2. 6. We must pray for it, James 1. 5, with application to our particular calling, and the various occasions we have ; as Solomon, Give me an understanding, not to please curiosity, but to judge thy people. That is the best knowledge, which will be serviceable to us in doing our duty ; and such that knowledge is, which enables us to discern between good and bad, right and wrong, sin and duty, truth and falsehood, so as not to be imposed

upon by false colours, in judging of others' actions, or of our own.

God is well pleased with his own work in his people; the desires of his own kindling, the prayers of his Spirit's inditing. Those are accepted of God, who prefer spiritual blessings to temporal, and are more solicitous to be found in the way of their duty, than in the way to preferment. It was a prevailing prayer, and prevailed for more than he asked. God gave him wisdom. Such an insight, and such a foresight, never was any other prince so blessed with. God gave him riches and honour. These are God's gift, and are promised, as far as is good for them, to all that seek first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, Matt. 6. 33. Let young people prefer grace to gold, because godliness has the promise of the life that now is, but the life that now is has not the promise of godliness. How blessed was Solomon, that had both wisdom and wealth! He that has wealth and power without wisdom and grace, is in danger of doing hurt with it. But if we make sure of wisdom and grace, these will bring outward prosperity with them, or sweeten the want of it. See here, 1. That the way to obtain spiritual blessings, is, to be importunate for them; to wrestle with God in prayer for them, as Solomon did for wisdom, asking that only, as the one thing needful. 2. That the way to obtain temporal blessings, is, to be indifferent to them, and to refer ourselves to God concerning them. Solomon has wisdom given him, because he did ask it, and wealth, because he did not.

Ver. 16—28. *The judgment of Solomon.*

An instance of Solomon's wisdom is given. Notice the difficulty of the case. The question was, Who was the mother of this living child, which was to be finally adjudged either to the one, or to the other? Both mothers were vehement in their claims, and showed deep concern. Both were peremptory in their assertions. There was no evidence on either side. Perhaps the mother of the dead child feared some reproach or punishment for having occasioned the death of the child. Solomon having patiently heard both, called for a sword, and gave orders to divide the living child between the two contenders! It proved an effectual discovery of the truth. To find out the true mother, he could not try which the child loved best, and therefore tried

which loved the child best; both pretended to a motherly affection, but their sincerity will be tried, when the child is in danger. She that knew the child was her own, rather than the child should be destroyed, gives it up to her adversary. How feelingly does she cry out, O, my lord! give her the living child. Let parents show their love to their children, by taking care of them, especially, by taking care of their souls, and, with a holy violence, snatching them as brands out of the burning. Those are most likely to have the comfort of children, who do their duty to them. Satan pretends to the heart of man, but by this it appears he is only a pretender, that he would be content to divide it with God, whereas the rightful Sovereign of the heart will have all or none.

How many professors, like this pretended mother, would mutilate the scriptures, and leave out what is opposed to their pride and lusts—they would even divide their heart between God and mammon. But the true believer loves the whole scripture, and holds it fast. This affection proves the whole to be his own. Our Solomon will shortly decide between these. Solomon had great reputation among his people, by this and other instances of the wisdom with which God endued him. This strengthened him, Eccl. 7. 19; this was better to him than weapons of war, Eccl. 9. 18; for this he was both feared and loved.

16. Or tavern-keepers: see on Joshua 2. 1.

28. "Feared," or rather, "revered" the king.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1—19. *Solomon's court—His purveyors.*

In the choice of the great officers of Solomon's court, no doubt, his wisdom appeared. It is observable that several are the same that were in his father's time. The purveyors for his household sent provisions from the several parts of the land, for the king's use. This was a salutary arrangement, and prevented any part of the country from being exhausted. Two of these purveyors married daughters of Solomon's. These marriages must have taken place long after his accession; the chapter in fact is a general account of the state of the land in his reign.

7. The revenues of princes in the east are paid in the fruits and productions of the earth. The twelve officers mentioned, ver. 17—19, are to be

considered as his general receivers. They furnished food for all that belonged to the king; and the having provisions for themselves and their attendants seems to have been all the ordinary gratification his ministers of state, as well as his meaner servants, received. Silver and gold, horses, armour, precious vestments, and other things of value, came to Solomon, as tribute from the surrounding princes, ch. 10. 25, and from merchants whom he allowed to pass through his territory, ver. 15, also from his own commerce by the Red sea, ver. 22. From these precious things he made presents to those who distinguished themselves in his service, ch. 10. 26, 27. According to this plan of conducting the expenses of civil government, the history of Solomon is to be explained.—*Harmer.*

Ver. 20—28. *The extent and peaceful state of Solomon's dominions—His daily provision.*

Never did the crown of Israel shine so bright, as when Solomon wore it; nor was that kingdom ever so glorious a type of the kingdom of the Messiah, as then. The account here given answers the prophecies which we have, Psa. 72, which is a psalm for Solomon, but with reference to Christ. Solomon reigned not only over all Israel, but all the princes from the river Euphrates north-east, to the border of Egypt south-west, added to his honour, by doing him homage; and added to his wealth, by serving him, and bringing him presents. David, by successful wars, compelled them to subjection, and Solomon, by admirable wisdom, made their submission easy. He had peace on all sides. None of the nations that were subject to him, offered to shake off his yoke, or gave him any disturbance; but rather, thought themselves happy in their dependence upon him. Herein, his kingdom typified the Messiah's; for to him it is promised that he shall have the heathen for his inheritance, and that princes shall worship him, Isa. 49. 6, 7; 53. 12.

The subjects of this kingdom, and its inhabitants, were many and cheerful. Judah and Israel were many, and that good land sufficient to maintain them all. Now was fulfilled the promise made to Abraham, concerning the increase of his seed, Gen. 22. 17, as well as that concerning the extent of their dominion, Gen. 15. 18. God's spiritual Israel are many, at least they will be so when all come together, Rev. 7. 9. They were easy, they dwelt safely, or, with confidence and assurance, not disaffected, nor under apprehension of danger from enemies foreign or domestic. They were happy, and knew it; safe, and willing to think themselves so. They dwelt every man under his vine

and fig-tree. Solomon invaded no man's property, took not to himself their vineyards and olive-yards, as sometimes was the manner of the king, 1 Sam. 8. 14, but what they had they could call their own: he protected every man in the possession and enjoyment of his property.

The land was so free from all cause of terror, that the people regarded not the protection of walled cities. No part of the country was, upon any account, uneasy; and it continued so all the days of Solomon, without material interruption. The spiritual peace, and joy, and holy security, of all the faithful subjects of the Lord Jesus, were typified by this. The kingdom of God is not, as Solomon's was, meat and drink, but, what is infinitely better, righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Such a court Solomon kept, as can scarcely be paralleled. The vast number of his attendants, and the great resort to him, is shown by the provision made daily for his table, which would suffice for many thousand people. Let this remind us that in Christ all believers have a continual feast. Herein he far outdoes Solomon, that he feeds all his subjects, not with the bread that perishes, but with that which endures to eternal life.

Every one knew his place, and work, and time; and so this great court was kept without confusion. Solomon had a vast income, lived at a vast expense, and perhaps wrote with application to himself, Eccl. 5. 11. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them; and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes,—unless they have the satisfaction of doing good with them.

Ver. 29—34. *The wisdom of Solomon.*

Solomon's wisdom was more his glory than his wealth. God gave it him. The ordinary advances of reason are owing to his providence; sanctification of it, to his grace; and the extraordinary extent to which they arrived in Solomon, to a special grant of the Divine favour to him, in answer to prayer. He had quickness of thought, strength of memory, and clearness of judgment, such as never any man had. It is called largeness of heart, for the heart is often put for the powers of the mind. He had a vast compass of knowledge, could take things entire, and had an admirable faculty of laying them together. He was very free and com-

municative of his knowledge; had the gift of utterance, as well as wisdom. It is very desirable, that those who have large gifts of any kind, should have large hearts to use them for the good of others; this is from the hand of God, Eccl. 3. 12, 13. He shall enlarge the heart, Psa. 119. 32.

The greatness of Solomon's wisdom is illustrated by comparison. Chaldea and Egypt were nations famous for learning; thence the greeks borrowed theirs; but the greatest scholars of these nations were inferior to Solomon, ver. 30. The knowledge God gives by special favour, goes beyond that which man gets by his own labour. Some wise men in Solomon's time were in great repute; particularly Heman, and others who were levites, and employed by David in the temple-music, 1 Chron. 15. 19. Heman was his seer in the word of God, 1 Chron. 25. 5. Chalcol and Darda also were noted for learning and wisdom, but Solomon excelled them all, ver. 30. His wisdom was spoken of in all nations round about. He did not bury his talents, but showed his wisdom. As to his compositions—those in divinity, written by Divine inspiration, are not mentioned here, for they are extant, and will remain to the world's end, monuments of his wisdom; and are, as other parts of scripture, of use to make us wise unto salvation. He spake, or dictated to be written, three thousand proverbs, wise sayings, of admirable use for the conduct of human life. Whether the proverbs of Solomon that we have, were any part of the three thousand, is uncertain. He was also a poet. His songs were a thousand and five, one only is extant, because that only was divinely inspired, which is therefore called his Song of songs. He was also a natural philosopher, and a man of great learning, and insight into the mysteries of nature. He spoke or wrote both of plants and animals. He seems to have possessed more accurate and extensive knowledge than any other mere man in the world.

What treasures of wisdom and knowledge are lost! But every information that is needful for salvation is preserved in the sacred scriptures. There came persons from all parts, who were more inquisitive after knowledge than their neighbours, to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Solomon was, herein, a type of

Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and hid for us, for he is made of God to us, wisdom. His fame shall spread through all the earth, and all people shall come to him, learn of him, and take upon them his easy yoke, and find rest for their souls. While we look with longing desires and fervent prayers for those glorious days, let us now come to Him, hear his word, ask wisdom of him, submit to his will, and seek his glory. Then outward tribulations shall not break our inward peace; we shall be satisfied with the plenteousness of His house, and enjoy true liberty, till after some glimpse of his glory on earth we shall remove to brighter worlds above.

32, 33. The books of Solomon here mentioned were no part of the canonical scriptures. These three thousand proverbs were perhaps only spoken, not committed to writing. The songs, a thousand and five, were probably his youthful compositions. His universal history of vegetables and animals belonged to philosophy. It was not necessary for every one to be acquainted with them, and though their loss is to be deplored, considering the unequalled wisdom conferred upon their author, yet it is a loss which only the busy investigators of nature have cause to lament.—*T. H. Horne*. Solomon's proverbs were short and deep and useful sentences, whereof a great and the best part are contained in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Of his songs, the chief and the most divine are in the Canticles.—*Poole*.

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1—9. *Solomon's agreement with Hiram for building the temple.*

Tyre was a famous trading city upon the sea, in the border of Israel; its inhabitants were not of the devoted nations, nor at enmity with Israel; therefore David lived in friendship with them. Hiram their king was ever a lover of David; and we have reason to think he was a worshipper of the true God, and had himself renounced, though he could not reform the idolatry of his city. David's character won the affections of those without.

Here is Solomon's design to build a temple. Peace gave him opportunity to build it, and he resolved to set about it immediately. There is no adversary, ver. 4, no Satan, so the word is; no instrument of Satan to oppose it, or divert from it. Satan does all he can, to hinder temple work, 1 Thess. 2. 18; Zech. 3. 1; but when he is bound, Rev. 20. 2, we should be busy. When there is no evil occurrent, then let us be vigorous and zealous in that which is good,

and get it forward. When the churches have rest, let them be edified, Acts 9. 31. As God's providence excited Solomon to think of building the temple, by giving him wealth and leisure, so his promise encouraged him. Let God's promise quicken our endeavours.

Lebanon was the place whence the timber must be had, a noble forest in the north of Canaan, particularly expressed in the grant to Israel, Josh. 13. 5. But Solomon owns that though the trees were his, the israelites had not skill to hew timber like the sidonians, Hiram's subjects. Israel, in the things of God, are a wise and understanding people; yet, in curious arts, inferior to their neighbours. Better be an israelite, skilful in the law of God, than a sidonian, skilful to hew timber. All outward endowments and advantages should be made serviceable to the interests of Christ's kingdom.

Hiram speaks of Solomon's wisdom and the extent of his dominion with pleasure. Let us not envy others those secular advantages, or endowments of the mind, wherein they excel us. If Hiram undertake for the work, and do all Solomon's desire concerning the timber, he justly expects that Solomon shall undertake for the wages; Thou shalt accomplish my desire in giving food for my household; not only for the workmen, but for my own family. If Tyre supplies Israel with craftsmen, Israel will supply Tyre with corn, Ezek. 27. 17. Thus, by the wise disposal of Providence, one country has need of another, and is benefited by another, that there may be mutual correspondence and dependence, to the glory of God our common Parent.

Ver. 10—18. *Solomon's workmen and labourers.*

Each party made good his engagement. And there was confirmation of the friendship between them thereby. Here were many hands and many eyes employed, for preparation was now to be made, not only for the temple, but for all the rest of Solomon's buildings, both at Jerusalem, and in other places of his dominion, of which see ch. 9. 17—19. He speaks of the vastness of his undertakings, Eccl. 2. 4, I made me great works, which required this vast number of workmen. Many ancient inhabitants of the land assisted the tyrians; few comparatively of the israelites were employed. Thus the temple was chiefly built by the riches and labour of those who were originally gen-

tiles, which typified their being called into the church. It should seem Solomon was present at the founding of the temple, and that the first stone was laid with some solemnity. Solomon commanded, and they brought costly stones for the foundation; he would have some of the costliest stones laid, or buried rather, in the foundation, though, being out of sight, worse might have served. Christ, who is laid for a Foundation, is an elect and precious Stone, Isa. 28. 16. We should lay our foundation firm, and bestow most pains on that part of our religion which lies out of the sight of men.

David's immediate successor was appointed in an especial manner to build the temple of the Lord. Therein we perceive a representation of that infinitely more important work which is committed to the Son of God. The spiritual edifice rises from age to age, under his care, and shall receive continual increase. He has laid the foundation, and His hands shall finish it. Happy those who, "as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, for a habitation of God through the Spirit." Who is there among us that will build in the house of the Lord?—(60.)

(*Read 2 Chron. 2. with this chapter.*)

CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1—10. *The building of Solomon's temple.*

The temple is called the house of the Lord, because it was directed and modelled by him. Infinite Wisdom was the Architect, and gave David the plan or pattern by the Spirit; and because it was dedicated and devoted to him and to his honour, to be employed in his service, Heb. 9. 1, 10. This gave it the beauty of holiness, that it was the house of the Lord, which far transcended all other beauties.

The temple was begun to be built 480 years after the bringing of the children of Israel out of Egypt. So long after the holy state was founded, before that holy house was built, which, in less than 430 years, was burned by Nebuchadnezzar. It was thus long deferred; Israel had, by their sins, rendered themselves unworthy of this honour, and because God would show how little he values outward pomp and splendour in his service, he was in no haste for a temple; yet, when God gave Solomon great wealth, he put it into his heart thus to employ it, and

graciously accepted him, chiefly, because it was to be a shadow of good things to come, Heb. 9. 9. The materials were brought ready for their places, so that there was neither hammer nor axe heard in the house while building. It was to be the temple of the God of peace, therefore no iron tool must be heard; quietness and silence become and befriend religious exercises. God's work should be done with as much care and as little noise as may be; the temple was thrown down with axes and hammers; they that did this roared in the midst of the congregation, Psa. 74. 4, 6; but it was built up in silence. Clamour and violence often hinder, but never further the work of God. Thus the kingdom of God in the heart of man grows up in silence, Mark 5. 27.

Ver. 11—14. *God's promise concerning the temple.*

God let Solomon know that he noticed what he was doing, and the house he was building. None employ themselves for God, without having his eye upon them. By this promise he might be encouraged and comforted in his work. By the condition annexed, he might be awakened to consider, that though he built the temple ever so strong, the glory would soon depart, unless he and his people continued to walk in God's statutes. God plainly let him know that all the charge for erecting this temple, would neither excuse them from obedience to the law of God, nor shelter them from judgments, in case of disobedience. Thus animated by the message God had sent him, thus admonished not to expect that God would own his building, unless he were obedient to his laws, Solomon built and finished; he went on, and God went with him till it was completed. Having begun to build, he was both able and willing to finish, for he was a wise builder.

Ver. 15—38. *Particulars respecting the temple.*

The walls of the temple were lined with cedar, ornamented with exquisite workmanship; and it was floored with planks of fir, both covered with gold. It was divided in the same manner and proportion as the tabernacle, though twice the size. The cherubim were emblems of the angels, as worshipping God our Saviour, and delighting to contemplate the mysteries of redemption. The true church of God is most glorious within,

and the true believer is most employed in adverting to the state of his heart.

See what was typified by this temple.

1. Christ is the *true* Temple. He himself spake of the temple of his body, John 2. 21. God himself prepared him his body, Heb. 10. 5. In him dwelt the fulness of the Godhead, as the Shechinah in the temple; in him meet all God's spiritual Israel; through him we have access with confidence to God; all the angels of God, those blessed cherubim, have a charge to worship him. 2. Every believer is a *living* temple, in whom the Spirit of God dwells, 1 Cor. 3. 16. Even the body is such by virtue of its union with the soul, 1 Cor. 6. 19. We are not only wonderfully made, by the Divine providence, but more wonderfully made anew by Divine grace; this living temple is built upon Christ as its Foundation, and will be perfect in due time. 3. The gospel church is the *mystical* temple. It grows to a holy temple in the Lord, Eph. 2. 21, enriched and beautified with the gifts and graces of the Spirit, as Solomon's temple with gold and precious stones. Only jews built the tabernacle, but gentiles join with them in building the temple; even strangers and foreigners are built up a habitation of God, Eph. 2. 19—22. The temple was divided into the holy place, and the most holy, the courts into the outer and inner; so there is the visible and the invisible church. This temple is built firm, upon a Rock; not to be taken down, as the tabernacle of the Old Testament. The temple was long in preparing, but was built at last; the top-stone of the gospel church will, at length, be brought forth with shoutings, and it is a pity that there should be the clashing of axes and hammers in the building of it. Angels are ministering spirits, attending the church on all sides, and all the members of it. 4. Heaven is the *everlasting* temple. There the church will be fixed; the streets of the new Jerusalem, in allusion to the floor of the temple, are said to be of pure gold, Rev. 21. 21. The cherubim there always attend the throne of glory. The temple was uniform, and in heaven there is perfection of beauty and harmony. In Solomon's temple there was no noise of axes and hammers; every thing is quiet and serene in heaven. All that shall be stones in that building, must, in the present state of

probation and preparation, be fitted and made ready for it; must be hewn and squared by Divine grace, and so made meet for a place there.

Let sinners come to Jesus as the living Foundation, that they may be built on him, a part of this spiritual house, consecrated in body and soul to the glory of God.

(*Read 2 Chron. 3. with this chapter.*)

The temple built by Solomon stood on mount Moriah, an eminence of the mountainous ridge called mount Zion. This superb structure was formed after the plan and model of the tabernacle, but it was much larger. It was surrounded, except at the front, or east end, by three stories of chambers, each five cubits square, which reached to half the height of the temple, and the front was ornamented with a magnificent portico, which rose to the height of one hundred and twenty cubits. The form of the whole edifice would not be unlike that of some ancient churches, which have a lofty tower in the front, and a low aisle running along each side of the building. The utensils for the sacred service were the same as in the tabernacle, excepting that several of them, as the altar, candlestick, &c. were larger, in proportion to the more spacious edifice to which they belonged. Various attempts have been made to describe the proportions and the several parts of this structure, but scarcely any two writers agree on the subject. It retained its original splendour only about thirty-four years.—*T. H. Horne.*

The building of the temple was a work of extraordinary despatch, if we consider its magnitude, variety, and minuteness. The summit of the rocky limestone mount of Moriah was first to be levelled, and hollows and inequalities filled up, in order to form a sufficient area or platform for the temple itself, its courts, porticos, and surrounding offices, which altogether composed a prodigious pile of building, the most splendid and magnificent, perhaps, that the world ever saw; worthy of the Divine Architect who planned, and of the wise and opulent prince who executed it.—*Hales.*

Besides the building of the sanctuary, the holy of holies, and the chambers erected against the wall of the main building, the temple contained a number of courts or enclosed spaces, and a variety of rooms appropriated for different purposes. The word temple applies to the whole edifice, which the readers of the scriptures should bear in mind, as transactions are often said to have occurred in the temple, which took place in the courts or chambers, not in the principal building itself. To obtain sufficient space for these courts, &c., which, according to *Josephus*, covered a square, four stadia, or half a mile in circuit, Solomon enlarged the area of the top on the mountain by raising a terrace from the valley beneath, four hundred cubits (more than seven hundred feet) in height. The site of the temple was a rock on the brow of a terrific precipice. When we consider the buildings in addition to the temple itself, and the vast labour bestowed on its foundations, with the greater proportion of manual labour, as compared with machinery, then employed, we can easily account for the vast number of workmen engaged in this structure, though the building of the sanctuary was not very spacious. *Pliny* states

that no less than 360,000 men were employed for twenty years in erecting one of the pyramids. *Calmét* estimates the ground plot to have been a square of six hundred cubits. *Cumberland* calculates the length of the temple itself to have been 109 feet 5 inches; the width 36 feet and 5 inches; the height 54 feet 8 inches.

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1—12. *Solomon's buildings for his own use.*

The house of the forest at Lebanon is supposed to have been a country-seat near Jerusalem, so called from the pleasantness of its situation, and the trees that encompassed it. Others think that it was a house built in the forest of Lebanon itself. At his house, where he dwelt in Jerusalem, Solomon built a great hall, or porch of judgment, where was set the throne for the trial of causes in which he was appealed to. He built a house for his wife, where she kept her court. The wonderful magnificence of all these buildings is taken notice of; the foundation-stones were costly for their size, four or five yards square, or, at least, so many yards long, and costly for the workmanship.

All Solomon's buildings, though magnificent, were intended for use, not for ostentation. Solomon began with the temple; built for God first, and then his other buildings. The surest foundations of lasting prosperity are those laid in early piety, Matt. 6. 33. He was thirteen years building his house, yet he built the temple in little more than seven years; not that he was more exact, but less eager in building his own house, than in building God's. He was impatient till the temple was finished, and fit for use: we ought to prefer God's honour before our own ease and satisfaction.

10. In the ruins of Baalbec, in Syria, modern travellers have observed stones 58 feet long, 9 in height, and 12 in thickness.

Ver. 13—47. *Furniture and utensils of the temple.*

Here is an account of the brass work about the temple.

1. Two brazen pillars set up in the porch of the temple for ornament and significance. Their significance is intimated in the names, Jachin, He will establish; and Boaz, In him is strength. Some think they were intended for memorials of the pillar and cloud of fire, which led Israel through the wilderness. Others think them designed to teach those that came to worship at God's door to

depend upon God only, not upon any sufficiency of their own, for strength and establishment in all their religious exercises. When we come to wait upon God, and find our hearts wandering and unfixed, then, by faith, let us seek for help from Heaven. Jachin, God will fix this roving mind. It is good that the heart be established with grace. We find ourselves weak and unable for holy duties, but this is our encouragement. Boaz, In him is our strength, who works in us both to will and to do. I will go in the strength of the Lord God. Spiritual strength and stability are to be had at the door of God's temple, where we must wait for the gifts of grace, in the use of the means of grace.

Whatever we do to support the house and worship of God, we should look to him for assistance and strength. The two pillars, Jachin and Boaz, suggest this thought to us.—(4.)

2. A brazen sea; a very large vessel, above five yards diameter, which contained above 500 barrels of water for the priests' use, in washing themselves, conducting the sacrifices, and keeping the courts of the temple clean. It stood raised upon the figures of twelve oxen in brass, so high, that either they must have had stairs to climb up to it, or cocks at the bottom to draw water from it. The gibeonites, or nethinim, who drew water for the house of God, had the care of filling it.

3. Ten bases, or stands, or settles of brass, on which were put ten lavers, also to be filled with water for the service of the temple. The bases on which the lavers were fixed are very largely described. They were curiously adorned, and set upon wheels, that the lavers might be removed as there was occasion. Each laver contained forty baths, that is, about ten barrels. They must be very clean that bear the vessels of the Lord. Spiritual priests and spiritual sacrifices must be washed in the laver of Christ's blood, and of regeneration. We must wash often, for we daily contract pollution; cleanse our hands, and purify our hearts. Plentiful provision is made for our cleansing; so that if we have our lot for ever among the unclean, it will be our own fault. Let us therefore bless God for the fountain which he hath opened by the sacrifice of Christ for sin and for uncleanness.

4. There were many brass pots, and vessels made to boil the flesh of the peace-offerings in, upon which the priests and offerers were to feast before the Lord; also shovels, wherewith they took out the ashes of the altar; or flesh-hooks, with which they took meat out of the pot. The basins to receive the blood of the sacrifices also were of brass.

Ver. 48—51. *The vessels of gold in the temple.*

What was not expended in the building and furniture, was laid up in the treasury. What parents have dedicated to God, children ought by no means to alienate or recall; they should cheerfully confirm what was intended for pious and charitable uses, that they may, with their estates, inherit the blessing.

All within doors was gold, and all made new except the ark, with its mercy-seat and cherubim. The altar of incense was still one, for Christ and his intercession are so; but Solomon made ten golden tables, 2 Chron. 4. 8, (though here mention is made of that one only, on which the shew-bread was,) and ten golden candlesticks, intimating the much greater plenty both of spiritual food and heavenly light, which the gospel blesses us with, than the law of Moses could. Even the hinges of the doors were gold, that every thing might be alike magnificent. Christ is indeed both the Temple and the Builder; the Altar and the Sacrifice; the Light of our souls, and the Bread of life; able to supply all the wants of all that have applied or shall apply to him. Outward images cannot represent, words cannot express, the heart cannot conceive his preciousness or his love. Let us come to him, and wash away our sins in his blood; let us seek for the purifying grace of his Spirit; let us maintain communion with the Father through his intercession, and yield up ourselves and all we have to his service. Being strengthened by him, we shall be accepted, useful, and happy.

(*Read 2 Chron. 4. with this chapter.*)

CHAPTER VIII.

Ver. 1—11. *The feast of the dedication of the temple.*

The temple, while without the ark, was like a house without an inhabitant. The bringing in the ark, is the end which must crown the work: this was done with great solemnity. In the ark was nothing but the two tables of stone. The pot of manna and Aaron's rod were by

the ark, but not in it. With the ark was brought up the tabernacle of the congregation. Thus will all the church's holy things on earth, that are so much its joy and glory, be swallowed up in the perfection of holiness above. The ark was fixed in the place appointed for its rest in the oracle of the house; whence they expected God to speak to them, even in the most holy place, which was made so by the presence of the ark, under the wings of the great cherubim, which Solomon set up, ch. 6. 27, signifying the special protection of angels, which God's ordinances and the assemblies of his people are taken under. The staves of the ark were drawn out, so as to be seen from under the wings of the cherubim, to direct the high priest to the mercy-seat, over the ark, when he went in, once a year, to sprinkle the blood there; so that they continued of use, though there was no longer occasion to carry it by them.

God graciously owned what was done, and testified his acceptance. The priests might come into the most holy place, till God manifested his glory; but, thenceforward, none might approach the ark, except the high priest, on the day of atonement. By this visible emanation of the Divine glory, God put honour upon the ark, and owned it as a token of his presence. He will have it looked upon with as much veneration as when Moses first brought it into his tabernacle. He testified his acceptance of the building and furnishing of the temple. He struck an awe upon this great assembly; and confirmed their belief of what they read in the books of Moses, concerning the glory of God's appearances to their fathers; also he showed himself ready to hear the prayer Solomon was about to make. The glory of God appearing in a dark cloud may signify, 1. The darkness of that dispensation, in comparison with the light of the gospel, by which, with open face, we behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord. 2. The darkness of our present state, in comparison with the vision of God, which will be the happiness of heaven, where the Divine glory is unveiled. Now we can only say what he is not; then we shall see him as he is.

8. The oracle, or most holy place, was entirely dark. The staves being thus drawn out into the holy place, would guide the high priest when he entered, as well as be a testimony that the ark was there.

Ver. 12—21. *Solomon declares the occasion for which they assembled.*

Solomon encouraged the priests, who came out of the temple from their ministration, much astonished at the dark cloud that overshadowed them. When we wait upon the Lord in the ways of his appointment, we shall receive tokens of his special favour; yet his light is inaccessible to us sinners, and the cloud with which he veils his brightness sometimes obstructs our view of his love, and causes us to fear his judgments. But the dark dispensations of Providence should quicken us in fleeing for refuge to the hope of the gospel. Nothing is more effectual to reconcile us to dark dispensations, than to consider what God hath said, and to compare his word and works together. Solomon instructed the people, and gave them a plain account concerning this house, which they now saw God take possession of. He spoke briefly to the priests, to satisfy them; but turned from them to the congregation that stood in the outer court, and addressed them largely. He blessed them; that is, he pacified them, and freed them from the consternation they were in. To receive this blessing, they all stood, in token of reverence, and readiness to hear and accept it. He informed them concerning the house he had built, and was now dedicating. He begins his account with a thankful acknowledgment of the good hand of his God upon him hitherto; Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, ver. 15. What we have the pleasure of, God must have the praise of. We have the best sense of God's mercies when we trace the streams to the fountain of the covenant, and compare what God does with what he has said. Solomon recited what he had done, and with what intention; I have built an house, not for my own name, but for the name of the Lord God of Israel, and have set there a place for the ark. Whatever good we do, we must look upon it as the performance of God's promise to us, rather than the performance of our promises to him. The more we do for God, the more we are indebted to him; for our sufficiency is of him, and not of ourselves.

Ver. 22—53. *Solomon's prayer.*

Next follows Solomon's prayer; his request that this temple might be deemed and taken, not only for a house of sacrifice, but a house of prayer for all people;

herein it was a type of the gospel church : see Isa. 56. 7, compared with Matt. 21. 13. Solomon did not appoint one of the priests or one of the prophets to do this, but did it himself. He was far from thinking it any disparagement to be the mouth of the assembly to God ; and shall any think themselves too great to do this office for their own families ? Solomon, in all his other glory, even on his ivory throne, looked not so great as he did now. Great men should thus support the reputation of religious exercises, and honour God with their greatness. Solomon was herein a type of Christ, the great Intercessor for all over whom he rules.

The posture in which he prayed was very reverent, and expressive of humility, seriousness, and fervency in prayer. He kneeled down, ver. 54. Kneeling is the most proper posture for prayer, Eph. 3. 14. Outward expressions of the fixedness and fervour of devotion, ought not to be despised or ridiculed. Having such a multiplicity of persons, cases, and wants to spread before the Lord, our hearts should be enlarged to pray copiously as well as fervently. We shall not be condemned for long prayers, if they are not formal and tedious by unmeaning repetitions. But prayers of others benefit not those who do not pray earnestly for themselves.

In this excellent prayer Solomon does as we should do in every prayer. He gives glory to God. Fresh experiences of the truth of God's promises call for enlarged praises. He sues for grace and favour from God. That God would perform to him and his the mercy which he had promised. The experiences we have of God's performing his promises, should encourage us to depend upon them, and plead them with God ; and those who expect further mercies, must be thankful for former mercies. God's promises must be the guide of our desires, and the ground of our hopes and expectations in prayer. He also entreats that God would have respect to this temple of which he had now taken possession, and that his eyes might be continually open towards it. That he would graciously own it, and so put honour upon it. He humbly acknowledges that the house he had built, could not contain God.

The Lord was not more present in the temple than elsewhere, yet he had recorded his name in the temple, and it was a peculiar type of the human nature

of Christ, in whom God is reconciling the world unto himself. The sacrifices, the incense, and the whole service of the temple, were all typical of the Redeemer's offices, oblation, and intercession. The temple, therefore, was continually to be remembered. Accordingly the israelites, when far distant, were accustomed to turn their faces towards it, expressing thereby that they depended for acceptance on the sacrifices there offered ; when near, they resorted thither to offer their prayers.

Under one word, "forgive," Solomon comprised all that he could ask in behalf of his people. For, as all misery springs from sin, forgiveness of sin prepares the way for the removal of every evil, and the communication of every good. Without it, no deliverance can prove a blessing.

He mentions divers cases in which he supposed application would be made to God by prayer, in or toward this house of prayer. If God were appealed to by an oath for the determining of any controverted right between man and man, and the oath were taken before this altar, he prayed that God would, some way or other, discover the truth, and judge between the contending parties, ver. 31, 32. The israelites would not be smitten before their enemies, ver. 33, except they sinned against God. Notwithstanding their temple and sacrifices, they could not expect deliverance without repentance and turning to the Lord—without offering their supplications at or towards the temple, to Him who dwelt upon the mercy-seat between the cherubim. The same remark applies in respect to the other public or private calamities afterwards specified.

In addition to the teaching of the word of God, Solomon entreated the Lord himself to teach the people to profit by all, even by their chastisements. Genuine knowledge, repentance, faith, and prayer induce to newness of life, and issue therein. In case of personal afflictions, ver. 38—40, he supposes that the complainants themselves would sensibly feel the evil of their own burden, and would open that case to God, with which they did not acquaint any man. They shall know every man the plague of his own heart, what it is that pains him ; and shall spread their hands, that is, spread their case, in prayer, toward this house ; whether the trouble be of body or mind, they shall represent it before God. Inward burdens seem

especially meant. Sin is the plague of our own heart, our in-dwelling corruptions are our spiritual diseases; every true israelite endeavours to know these, that he may mortify them, and watch against the risings of them. These he complains of, this is the burden he groans under; O wretched man that I am! These drive him to his knees, drive him to the sanctuary; lamenting these, he spreads forth his hands in prayer. He refers all cases of this kind, that should be brought hither, to God. This use we should make of the mercy of God to us in hearing our prayers, and forgiving our sins—we should be engaged to fear him. Fear the Lord and his goodness; there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared.

The case of the stranger not an israelite is next mentioned; a proselyte who comes to the temple to pray to the God of Israel, being convinced of the folly and wickedness of worshipping the gods of his own country. 1. Solomon supposes that there would be many such. Accordingly there was a court, called the court of the gentiles, appropriated to their use who came from other nations to worship the God of Israel, but who did not observe the ceremonial law. 2. He begs that God would accept and answer the proselyte's prayer. Thus early, thus ancient, were the indications of favour toward the sinners of the gentiles. As there was then one law for the native and for the stranger, Exod. 12. 49, so there was one gospel for both. Would to God that all the children of men might receive the adoption, and be made God's children. Father, thus glorify thy name.

The case of an army going forth to battle is recommended by Solomon to the Divine favour. Soldiers in the field must not think it enough that they who tarry at home pray for them, but must pray for themselves; they are here encouraged to hope for a gracious answer.

The case of poor captives is the last here mentioned as a proper object of Divine compassion. Solomon supposes that Israel would sin. He knew them, and himself, and the nature of man, too well to think this a foreign supposition; for there is no man that sinneth not, so as to justify God in the severest rebukes of his providence. If Israel revolt, God will be angry with them, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies, to be carried

captive into a strange country. He then supposes that they will consider their ways; and will repent and pray, will confess their sins, and humble themselves. This part of Solomon's intercession was answered in the restoration of the jews after the babylonish captivity. They bethought themselves, repented, and prayed; the Lord heard, forgave, and restored them to their own land. He prays that God would hear their prayers, forgive their sins, plead their cause, and incline their enemies to have compassion on them. God has all hearts in his hand. See this prayer answered, Psal. 106. 46. He pleads their relation to God, and his interest in them.

After all these particulars, Solomon concludes with the general request; that God would hearken to all his praying people. No place, now under the gospel, can be imagined to add any acceptableness to the prayers made in or towards it, as the temple then did. That was a shadow, the substance is Christ; whatever we ask in his name, it shall be given us. Often did offending Israel in this way prove the mercy of God; when they sought him under their distresses, there failed not one word he had promised; but at length his threatenings were accomplished. Yet even in their present dispersion, they will bethink themselves and turn to God, dwelling in his true temple, and shall be numbered among his people. May they speedily be restored, that their conversion may be as life from the dead, to the gentile nations, that all the people of the earth may know, and worship our God and Saviour.

When the sinner is humbled before God, when he returns to the Lord with his whole heart, and prays unto him in the Saviour's name—then he has begun to receive the benefit of Christ's intercession. Whatever may be his grief, his terror, his burden, the guilt of his conscience, the depravity of his heart, the force of temptation, or the pressure of affliction, he will bring and spread it in secret before a heart-searching and merciful God. Thus he will obtain pardon and peace, and he will learn to love and fear the Lord all his days. In this manner the Israel of God is established and sanctified, the backslider is recovered and healed. In this manner the stranger is brought nigh, the mourner is comforted, the name of God is glorified.

All Solomon's arguments in this plea for his people, were drawn from the Lord's choice of them, and the favours he had bestowed upon them. Some other circumstances not noted here will be found 2 Chron. 6. And let other nations be instructed by the example of Israel. Princes and nobles should set the example in the worship of God. Public calamities should excite to national repentance, reformation, and prayer. These things would best secure public peace and prosperity. The same should be the conduct of churches, families, and individuals. Sin is the cause of all our troubles; repentance and forgiveness lead to all human happiness.

Ver. 54—61. *Solomon's blessing and exhortation.*

Never was a congregation dismissed with what was more likely to affect them, and abide with them. Solomon gives God the glory of the great and kind things he had done for Israel. He blesses God who has given *rest* to Israel. Let not those who have rest undervalue that blessing, though they want some other. He blesses himself and the congregation, expressing his earnest desire and hope of these four things. 1. The presence of God with them—that is all in all to the happiness of a church and nation, and of every particular person. 2. The power of his grace upon them—that he may incline our hearts to himself, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments. Spiritual blessings are the best blessings, which we should covet earnestly; our hearts are naturally averse to our duty, and apt to decline from God; it is grace that inclines them, grace that must be obtained by prayer. 3. An answer to the prayer he had now made. Let a gracious return be made to every prayer that shall be made here, and that will be a continual answer to this prayer.—What Solomon asks for in this prayer, is still granted in the intercession of Christ, of which his supplication was a type. That powerful, prevailing intercession is before the Lord our God day and night; for our great Advocate attends continually to this very thing, and we may depend upon Him to maintain our cause, against the adversary that accuses us day and night, Rev. 12. 10. We shall receive grace sufficient, suitable, and seasonable, in every time of need. 4. The glorifying God in the enlargement of his kingdom among men. Let Israel

be thus blessed, thus favoured, that all people may know that the Lord is God, and he only, and may come and worship him.

Solomon solemnly charges his people to persevere in their duty to God. His admonition at parting, is, Let your heart be perfect with the Lord our God; let your obedience be universal without declining; this is evangelical perfection. No human heart is of itself inclined to obey the gospel call to repentance, faith, and newness of life, walking in all the commandments of the Lord, yet Solomon exhorts the people to be perfect. This is the scriptural method, though to many that judge unwisely it appears inconsistent. It is our duty to obey the command of the law and the call of the gospel, seeing we have broken the law. When our hearts are inclined thereto, feeling our inability, we pray for Divine assistance; we thus are enabled to serve God acceptably through Jesus Christ. More systematical attempts at consistency puzzle newly awakened sinners with difficulties, and go beyond their measure of knowledge and experience.

Ver. 62—66. *Solomon's sacrifice of peace-offerings.*

Solomon offered a great sacrifice. When Moses dedicated his altar, the peace-offerings were few in number, then the people were poor; but now they were increased in wealth, more was expected from them. All these sacrifices could not be offered in one day, but in the several days of the feast. The flesh of the peace-offerings which belonged to the offerer, Solomon feasted the people with; Christ fed those who attended him. The brazen altar was not large enough to receive all these sacrifices. To serve the present occasion, they offered many in the middle of the court. He kept a feast, the feast of tabernacles, as it should seem, after the feast of dedication.

When the people were dismissed, they blessed the king, admired him, returned him thanks, and then went to their homes, easy and pleased. God's goodness was the matter of their joy; so it should be of ours at all times. They rejoiced in God's blessing, both on the royal family and on the kingdom; thus should we go home, rejoicing, from holy ordinances, and go on our way rejoicing for God's goodness to our Lord Jesus. Of Him David his servant was a type, in the advancement and establishment of his

throne, pursuant to the covenant of redemption; the people were a type of all believers, his spiritual Israel, in their sanctification and consolation, pursuant to the covenant of grace. If we rejoice not always herein it is our own fault.

(See 2 Chron. 5. 6. 7. particularly ch. 7. 1—11.)

CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 1—9. *God's answer to Solomon.*

God plainly sets before us good and evil, the blessing and the curse, and lets us know what we must trust to. God here tells Solomon, 1. That the establishment of his kingdom depended upon the constancy of his obedience. Let not the children of godly parents expect to succeed to the blessing, unless they tread in the steps of those that are gone before them to heaven, and keep up the piety of their ancestors. 2. That the ruin of his kingdom would be the certain consequence of his or his children's apostasy from God. The temple, though a holy house, which God himself had hallowed for his name, should be abandoned and laid desolate. Their sin will be read in their punishment, they deserted the temple, therefore God deserted it; they profaned it with their sins, and laid it common, therefore God profaned it with his judgments, and laid it waste. God warned Solomon of this, now he had newly built and dedicated it, that he and his people might not be high-minded, but fear. The obedience which is intended in all such declarations is the unreserved, though imperfect obedience of a penitent, believing sinner, whereby he shows his acceptance of unmerited mercies, and aims to glorify the God of his salvation. After all the services we can perform, we stand upon the same terms with the Lord as before. Nothing can purchase for us a dispensation to sin, nor would the true believer desire such a license. He longs for the mortification of every lust, and the increase of grace in his soul. He would rather be rebuked and chastened of the Lord, than allowed to go on in sin with ease and prosperity.

Ver. 10—14. *The mutual presents of Solomon and Hiram.*

Solomon, no doubt, gave Hiram food for his household, as was agreed, ch. 5. 9. Besides that, he gave him twenty cities in the land of Galilee. Hiram did

not like them. He called the country the land of Cabul, a phœnician word, says Josephus, which signifies displeasing. He therefore returned them to Solomon, 2 Chron. 8. 2. The tyrians were merchants that became rich by navigation, but knew not how to value a country fit for corn and pasture; that business lay out of their way. If Solomon would gratify him, let it be in his own element, by becoming his partner in trade, as he did, ver. 27. See how the providence of God suits both the accommodation of this earth to the various dispositions of men, and the dispositions of men to the various accommodations of the earth, and all for the good of mankind in general. Some delight in husbandry; others take as much delight in navigation. It is so in many other instances, in which we may observe the wisdom of Him whose all souls are, and all lands.

Ver. 15—28. *Solomon's buildings—His yearly sacrifices—His trade with Ophir.*

Here is a further account of Solomon's greatness: 1. His buildings. Solomon began his work at the right end, for he built God's house first, and finished that before he began his own; then God blessed him, and he prospered in all his other buildings. If we begin with God, he will go on with us; let the first-fruits be his, and the after-fruits will the more comfortably be ours, Matt. 6. 33. Those consult not their own interest, that defer to the last what they design for pious uses. Let piety begin, and profit proceed, and leave pleasure to the last. 2. His workmen and servants. Solomon employed those who remained of the conquered and devoted nations. Herein he observed Lev. 25. 44. 3. His piety and devotion. Three times in a year, he offered burnt-offerings extraordinary; beside what he offered at other times, both statedly, and upon special occasions. Whatever pains we take for the support of religion, to the glory of God, and the edification of others, we ourselves are likely to have the advantage of it. 4. His merchandise. He built a fleet of trading ships, at Ezion-geber, a port on the coast of the Red sea. David having subdued the edomites, it now pertained to the crown of Judah. The fleet traded to Ophir. Gold was the commodity traded for. Canaan, the holy land, the glory of all lands, had no gold in it: which shows that the best produce is that which is more immediately for the present support and

comfort of life, our own and others; such were the productions of Canaan. Solomon got much by his merchandise, and yet has directed us to a better trade, within reach of the poorest, having assured us from his own experience, that the merchandise of Wisdom is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold, Prov. 3. 14.

(*Read 2 Chron. 8. with this chapter.*)

18. Tadmor, afterwards called Palmyra, was a magnificent city of Syria on the borders of Arabia Deserta. The ruins which remain show it must have been one of the most magnificent cities of the east. It was probably erected by Solomon as a check on the intercourse between Syria and Mesopotamia, and was a place of considerable importance in the latter ages of the roman empire.

28. Ophir. Several places have been pointed out as the Ophir here mentioned; but the most probable supposition is, that it was on the eastern coast of Africa, the country now called Sofala.

CHAPTER X.

Ver. 1—13. *The queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon.*

The queen of Sheba came not to treat of trade or commerce, or the common occasions for the meetings of crowned heads: but she came to receive instruction from Solomon; she came to hear his wisdom, thereby to improve her own, Matt. 12. 42. Those whom God has called to any public employment, particularly in the magistracy and ministry, should, by all means possible, improve themselves in that knowledge which will enable them to discharge their trust well. It should seem, that she chiefly aimed to be instructed in the things of God. Therefore our Saviour mentions her inquiries after God, by Solomon, as an aggravation of the stupidity of those who inquire not after God, by our Lord Jesus Christ. By waiting and prayer, by diligently searching the scriptures, by consulting wise and experienced christians, by practising what we have learned, we shall be delivered from difficulties, and a clearer light will shine upon our path.

She came with a very great retinue, agreeable to her rank; not as one begging, but abundantly to recompense Solomon for his attention to her; she came to trade for wisdom, which she would purchase at any rate. Solomon despised not the weakness of her sex, blamed her not for leaving home to come so long a journey, and putting herself and him to so much trouble and expense; but bid her welcome,

and all her train, gave her liberty to ask all her questions; he allowed her to commune with him of all that was in her heart, and gave satisfactory answers to all her questions. With the books of holy scripture in his hand, and the wise, understanding heart which the Lord had given him, Solomon could readily solve questions which were most difficult to the queen of Sheba. She received abundant instruction from him, and he informed her, no doubt, with particular care, concerning God, and his law and instituted worship. He had taken it for granted, ch. 8. 42, that strangers would hear of the great name of Jehovah, and would come to inquire after Him. Divers things are mentioned which she admired. But above all these, the first thing mentioned is Solomon's wisdom; and the last, which crowned all, is his piety. Every thing was so surprising, that there was no more spirit in her, but she stood amazed; she had never seen or heard the like. Solomon's wisdom made a deeper impression upon the queen of Sheba than all his prosperity and grandeur.

She owned her expectation far outdone, though highly raised by the report she heard. There is a spiritual excellence in heavenly things, and in consistent christians, to which no reports can do justice. Usually, things are represented to us, both by common fame and by our own imagination, much greater than we find them when we come to examine; but here the truth exceeded. And all those who, through grace, are brought to experience the delights of communion with God, will say the one half was not told them of the pleasures and the advantages of wisdom's ways. Glorified saints, much more, will say it was a true report which they heard of the happiness of heaven, but the thousandth part was not told them, 1 Cor. 2. 9. She pronounced them happy that constantly attended Solomon. It is a great advantage to be in good families, and to have opportunity of frequent converse with those that are wise and good. Many have this happiness, who know not how to value it. With much more reason may we say this of Christ's servants, Blessed are they that dwell in his house; they will be still praising him. She blessed God, the Giver of Solomon's wisdom and wealth, and the Author of his advancement, who had made him king. It more than doubles

our comforts, if we have reason to hope they come from God's delight in us.

Her expressions concerning the sovereignty and providence of God, the Giver of all wisdom and prosperity; concerning his free, unfailing love to his people, concerning the duty of kings and the happiness of the nations that have kings who discharge their duty; together with her praising God for his love to his people, prove her to have had an understanding and pious mind.

She made a noble present to Solomon. Thus she paid for the wisdom she had learned, and did not think she bought it dear. Let those who are taught of God, give him their hearts, and the present will be more acceptable than this of gold and spices. Mention is made of the great abundance Solomon had of his own; notwithstanding, she presented, and he accepted this gold. What we present to Christ, he needs not, but will have us so to express our gratitude. Solomon gave her whatsoever she asked. Thus they who apply themselves to our Lord Jesus, will find him not only greater than Solomon, and wiser, but more kind. Whatsoever we ask, it shall be done for us; nay, he will, out of his Divine bounty, which infinitely exceeds royal bounty, even Solomon's, do for us more than we are able to ask or think.

The awakened sinner, oppressed with difficulties, objections, and fears, hears of the Saviour's love, and inestimable riches, but can scarcely believe the report. But he resorts to him by faith and prayer, and is graciously received. The effectual teaching of the Lord, dispels darkness and distress, he satisfies him with the provisions of his house, and enriches him with the treasures of wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. The rejoicing believer no longer glories in himself and his attainments, nor is he terrified, though he is humbled with the knowledge of his own guilt. The person, the character, the love of Jesus, attract his admiration. They confirm his hopes of salvation, and he finds he was not told half of his preciousness. The believer who has been with Jesus will return to his station, will discharge his duties with new alacrity, and from better motives; looking forward to the day, when, being absent from the body, he shall be present with the Lord.

1. Our Lord speaks of the queen of Sheba as

the queen of the south, Matt. 12. 42. Her country lay to the south of Canaan. Some have supposed it part of Arabia, but others place it beyond Egypt, towards Abyssinia.

5. "His ascent by which he went up." Most versions render this, "The burnt-offerings which he offered in the house of the Lord."—*A. Clarke.*

11. It is not certain what sort of trees the almug-trees were. Josephus describes them as like the wood of the fig-tree, but whiter and more shining.

Ver. 14—29. *Solomon's wealth.*

Solomon increased his wealth. Though he had much, he still desired to have more, being willing to try the utmost the things of this world could do, to make men happy. He imported, not only gold, and silver, and ivory, substantial goods, and serviceable, but apes and peacocks: perhaps an evidence that Solomon and his people, being overcharged with prosperity, by this time, grew childish and wanton. He traded to Egypt for horses and linen-yarn, or linen-cloth, commodities of that country. Solomon, one of the greatest men that ever was, thought it no disparagement to him to trade. In all labour there is profit. He did not hoard up his wealth. These matters show the faithfulness of God to the promises which he had made to David and Solomon; whose reign typified the kingdom of the Messiah in its peace and prosperity, and in the submission and willing services of princes and nations, Psa. 72. He did not grudge himself what he had, but took the credit and comfort of it, such as it was.

Solomon made his wealth circulate among his subjects, so that the kingdom was rich; he had no separate interests of his own to consult, but sought the welfare of his people. Solomon was, herein, a type of Christ, who is not only rich himself, but enriches all that are his. Solomon was instrumental to bring so much gold into the country, that silver was nothing accounted of. There was such plenty of silver in Jerusalem, that it was as the stones; and cedars, that used to be very rare, became as common as sycamore trees. Such is the nature of worldly wealth, plenty of it makes it the less valuable; but much more should the enjoyment of spiritual riches lessen our esteem of all earthly possessions. If gold in abundance makes silver seem despicable, shall not wisdom, and grace, and the foretastes of heaven, which are far better than gold, make gold to be lightly esteemed? The spiritual peace, riches, and abundance of the Redeemer's kingdom, satisfy but never satiate, they

sanctify and strengthen the soul to resist temptation and mortify fleshly lust.

Thus rich, thus great was Solomon, and thus did he exceed all the kings of the earth. This was he, who, when setting out in the world, did not ask for wealth and honour, but asked for a wise and understanding heart. The more moderate our desires are towards earthly things, the better qualified are we for the enjoyment of them, and the more likely to have them. See in Solomon's greatness, the performance of God's promise, and let it encourage us to seek first the righteousness of God's kingdom. And this was he, who, having tasted all earthly enjoyments, wrote a book, to show the vanity of all worldly things, the vexation of spirit that attends them, their insufficiency to make us happy, and the folly of setting our hearts upon them: and to recommend to us the practice of serious godliness, as that which is the whole of man, and will do infinitely more toward making us easy and happy, than all the wealth and power he was master of; and which, through the grace of God, is within our reach, when the thousandth part of Solomon's greatness is a thousand times more than we can ever promise ourselves to enjoy in this world.

But "a greater than Solomon is here!" Even on earth he is present in his word, his ordinances, and on his throne of grace. The queen of the south shall rise up in judgment with this generation also. She came from afar to hear the wisdom of Solomon, but they will not rise from their beds, or go out of their houses, or even open their bibles, to hear the wisdom of the Son of God! This example shames every one of us; all are guilty of undervaluing our mercies, and of slackness in attending the means of grace. Let the careless and the infidel take warning, but let the humble inquirer be encouraged, for poor sinners of the gentiles are welcome to Christ. Let us sit at his feet, and wait for his salvation. Let us endeavour in all things to recommend him to our fellow-sinners around us.

Multitudes even of the most distinguished rank resorted to Solomon. But alas! this is not, as yet, fully exemplified in Jesus. He has been hitherto "despised and rejected of men." His glory, however, shall soon appear, and then even the rich among the people shall entreat his favour, Psa. 45. 12.—(60.)

22. Tharshish is supposed to have been in Spain. The phœnicians traded largely with that part of Europe. Vessels larger than common, such as were used in this trade, might be called ships of Tharshish, though employed elsewhere.

Hales considers that the ships of Solomon, on this voyage, proceeded westward to Cadiz, on the coast of Spain, and from thence southwards along the coast of Africa, as far as Guinea. This voyage might well occupy the navigators of that period during three years.

29. This is not to be understood of the chariots and horses themselves, but for the lading of chariots and horses, which, consisting of fine linen, were of great price.—*Poole*.

(*Read 2 Chron. 9. with this chapter.*)

CHAPTER XI.

Ver. 1—8. *Solomon's wives and concubines—He is drawn by them to idolatry.*

There is not a more melancholy and astonishing instance of human depravity in the sacred scriptures, than that here recorded. He who was named, Beloved of the Lord, who is declared to have loved the Lord, who had been favoured with such special tokens of God's favour, who had received such answers to prayer, who had been honoured to build the temple, who was renowned through the earth for wisdom and piety, who was a penman of sacred scripture, who gave such excellent counsel to others, who was so illustrious a type of Christ—he who was all these, even this person became a public worshipper of abominable idols! His declension probably was gradual in spiritual pride and luxury. Towards the close of his life his women gained greater ascendancy over him; they prevailed on him to connive at their idolatries, to build them idolatrous temples, and at length to join in their abominations. The fond hope numbers indulge who marry ungodly persons is here exposed. The best and wisest men are more likely to be corrupted by the converse of ungodly beloved companions, than to bring them to a sense of serious religion.

Such were the effects of the influence of evil women over the greatest and wisest of men. Without the Divine interposition it was impossible for one to stop short who had been once thus entangled. Therefore the inspired historian quotes the prohibition of marrying strange women, adding, Surely they will turn away your heart after their gods. Nothing forms in itself a security against the deceitfulness and depravity of the human heart. Nor will old age cure the heart of any evil propensity. If our

sinful passions are not crucified and mortified by the grace of God, they never will die of themselves, but will subsist even when opportunities of gratification are taken away.

What shall we say to this? Why God permitted it, it is not for us to inquire; he knew how to bring glory to himself out of it. God foresaw it, when he said concerning him that should build the temple, If he commit iniquity, &c. 2 Sam. 7. 14. But it concerns us to inquire what good use we may make of it. Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall. We see how weak we are of ourselves, without the grace of God; let us therefore live in a constant dependence on that grace. See the danger of a prosperous condition, and how hard it is to overcome the temptations of it. The food convenient, for which Agur prayed, is safer and better than the food abundant, which Solomon was even surfeited with. See what need those have to stand upon their guard, who have made a great profession of religion, and showed themselves forward and zealous in devotion; the devil will set upon them most violently, and if they misbehave, the reproach is the greater. It is the evening that commends the day; let us therefore fear, lest, having run well, we seem to come short. Let us then watch and be sober; ours is a dangerous warfare in an enemy's country, while the worst of our foes are the traitors that occupy our hearts.

Ver. 9—13. *God's anger against Solomon.*

Time was, when the Lord loved Solomon, 2 Sam. 12. 24, and delighted in him, ch. 10. 9, but now the Lord was angry with Solomon, for there was in his sin, the most base ingratitude and wilful disobedience; this was the very thing concerning which God had commanded him—that he should not go after other gods. The Lord told Solomon, it is likely by a prophet, what he must expect for his apostasy. The sentence is just, that since he had revolted from God, part of his kingdom should revolt from his family; he had given God's glory to the creature, therefore God would give his crown to his servant. Upon this message we have reason to hope that Solomon humbled himself before God, confessed his sin, sought for pardon, and returned to his duty. It is probable that he then published his repentance in the book of Ecclesiastes, where he bitterly laments his

own folly and madness, ch. 7. 25, 26, and warns others to take heed of the like evil courses, and to fear God, and keep his commandments, in consideration of the judgment to come. That penitential sermon was as true an indication of a heart broken for sin, and turned from it, as David's penitential psalms, though of another nature. God's grace in his people works variously. Thus, though Solomon fell, we trust he was not utterly cast down; what God had said to David concerning him, was fulfilled, I will chasten him with the rod of men, but my mercy shall not depart from him, 2 Sam. 7. 14, 15. Though God may suffer those whom he loves to fall into sin, he will not suffer them to lie still in it. Solomon's defection, though much his reproach, yet did not so far break the character of his reign, but that it was afterward made the pattern of a good reign, 2 Chron. 11. 17. But though we have reason to hope that he repented, and found mercy, yet the Holy Ghost did not expressly record it, but left it doubtful, for warning to others, not to sin upon presumption of repenting. Great sinners may have the benefit of repentance, yet be denied both the comfort and credit. The guilt may be taken away, but not the reproach; that will remain.

Thus it must remain uncertain till the day of judgment, whether he was not left to suffer the everlasting displeasure of an offended God. What a fearful thought, that so bright a sun should set at last under so dark a cloud!—(61.)

Ver. 14—25. *Solomon's adversaries.*

While Solomon kept close to God and to his duty, there was no adversary nor evil occurring, ch. 5. 4, nothing to create him any uneasiness; but here we have an account of two adversaries, inconsiderable, if Solomon had not first made God his enemy. What hurt could Hadad or Rezon have done to so great and powerful a king as Solomon was, if he had not, by sin, made himself mean and weak? If God be on our side, we need not fear the greatest adversary; but if he be against us, he can make us fear even the least, and the very grasshopper shall be a burden. Both these adversaries God stirred up. Though they themselves were moved by principles of ambition or revenge, God made use of them to serve his design of correcting Solomon. Whoever are, any way, adversaries to us, we must take notice of the hand of God

stirring them up to be so: we must look through the instruments of our trouble to the Author, and hear the Lord's controversy in it.

Hadad, an edomite, was an adversary to Solomon; we are told what induced him. Pharaoh was loth to part with him. What hast thou lacked with me? Nothing, said he; but let me go to my own country. Peter Martyr has a pious reflection upon this; "That heaven is our home, and we ought to keep up a holy affection to that, and desire towards it, even then when the world, the place of our banishment, smiles most upon us. Does it ask, What have you lacked, that you are so willing to be gone? We may answer, Nothing that the world can do for us; but however, let us go thither, where our hope, and honour, and treasure are." Rezon, a syrian, was another adversary; he was an enemy to Israel, during all Solomon's reign; but till Solomon's idolatry, when his defence was departed from him, he could not do any mischief.

Ver. 26—40. *Jeroboam's promotion foretold.*

We have here the first mention of that infamous name, Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that made Israel to sin. Solomon gradually advanced him, till he made him ruler of the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Some think he was contriving to rise to the throne; it is plainly intimated that he had it in his thoughts, for the prophet tells him, Thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth. The sign was, the rending of a garment into twelve pieces, and giving him ten. It is not certain whether the garment was Jeroboam's, or Ahijah's, but it is more probable that the prophet had clad himself with a new garment, on purpose that he might with it give him a sign. And it was more significant, to give him ten pieces of that which was not his own before, than of what already belonged to him. The prophets, both true and false, used signs.

Ahijah tells Jeroboam the reason he should be king over ten tribes; not for his good character or deserts, but for the chastising of Solomon's apostasy. Thus Israel must know that it is not for their righteousness, that they are made masters of Canaan, but for the wickedness of the canaanites, Deut. 9. 4. Jeroboam did not deserve so good a post, but Israel deserved so bad a prince. In telling

the reason why God rent the kingdom from the house of Solomon, Ahijah warns him to take heed of sinning away his preferment, in like manner.

Two tribes, called here one tribe, because little Benjamin was, in a manner, lost in the thousands of Judah, should remain sure to the house of David. He shall have one tribe, that David may have a lamp, that is, a shining name and memory, Psa. 132. 17. He must not think that David was rejected as Saul. God would not take his loving-kindness from him, as he did from Saul. The house of David must be supported; out of it the Messiah must arise. Solomon shall be prince, all the days of his life, not for his own sake, but for David my servant's sake, because he kept my commandments. Children who do not tread in their parents' steps, often fare the better in this world for their good parents' piety. And Jeroboam is given to understand, that if he forsook God, even his advancement to the throne would, in time, lay his family in the dust. Solomon sought to kill his successor. Had not he taught others, that whatever devices are in men's hearts, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand? And yet does he himself think to defeat that counsel? Jeroboam withdrew into Egypt. Though God's promise would have secured him any where, he would use means for his own preservation, and was content to live in exile and obscurity for a while, being sure of a kingdom at last. And shall not we be so, who have a better kingdom in reserve?

Ver. 41—43. *The death of Solomon.*

We have here the conclusion of Solomon's history, and in it reference is had to another history then extant, the book of the acts of Solomon. Probably, this book was written by a chronologer or historiographer, whom he employed to write his annals, out of which the sacred writer extracted what God saw fit to transmit to the church. His reign was as long as his father's, but his life was not so. Sin shortened his days.

If the world with all its advantages were able to satisfy the soul, and afford real joy, Solomon would have found it so. But he was disappointed in all, and for our admonition has left this record of all earthly enjoyments, "*Vanity and vexation of spirit.*" Base as the departure of Solomon was, the grace of God could pardon and recover him. To that grace

which is treasured up in the Saviour, let all flee who are ready to despond under a sense of their aggravated guilt. But let none derive encouragement, from the mercy and faithfulness of God, to continue in sin. Such confidence is dangerous presumption. "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin."—(60.)

The New Testament declares that one *greater* than Solomon is come to reign over us, and to possess the throne of his father David. May we not see something of Christ's excellency faintly represented to us in this figure? The Saviour was in a more exalted sense the Child of promise, and by express direction received a name which implies that he was chosen of God and precious. The most prominent feature in Solomon's character was wisdom; here especially we discover the similitude of Him, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, Col. 2. 3. Wisdom he possesses without any limits, and displays throughout the administration of his government: a measure of it also he imparts to all his people. Let us attend to his solemn address. "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men. O ye simple, understand wisdom, and ye fools, be of an understanding heart."—(60.)

(See 2 Chron. 9.)

CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1—15. *Rehoboam's accession—The people's petition to him—His rough answer.*

We do not read that Solomon had any son except Rehoboam, which may be considered as a providential rebuke for his multiplying his wives. Solomon was sensible his son was not likely to prove a wise man, nor to carry on his designs for the good of Israel; he greatly regretted it, Eccl. 2. 18, 19. His natural imprudence and rashness would be increased by the flattery of young men with whom he was brought up. Solomon came to the crown very young, yet he was then a wise man: Rehoboam, at forty years old, foolish. Wisdom does not always go by age, nor is it the multitude of years, or the advantage of education, that teaches it.

The representatives of the tribes addressed Rehoboam, praying to be eased of the taxes they were burdened with.

They sent for Jeroboam out of Egypt to come and be their speaker. They complain not of his father's idolatry, and revolt from God. That which was the greatest grievance of all, was none to them; so careless and indifferent were they in the matters of religion, if they might live at ease, and pay no taxes. Yet the complaint was groundless and unjust. Never did people live more at ease than they did, or in greater plenty. If Solomon's buildings cost them money, they cost them no blood, as war would do, and money also. Were many servile hands employed about them? They were not the hands of the israelites. Were the taxes a burden? Solomon caused silver to be, in a manner, as common as the stones, so that they did but render to Solomon the things that were Solomon's. Factious spirits will never want something to complain of. And when we see the scripture account of Solomon's reign; the peace, wealth, and prosperity Israel then enjoyed; we cannot doubt but that these charges were false, or greatly exaggerated.

The wise experienced men advised Rehoboam to give the petitioners a kind answer, and to make it his business to please them, and make them easy. "Deny thyself," say they, "so far as to do this, for this once, and they will be thy servants for ever. When the present heat is allayed with a soft answer, and the assembly dismissed, their cooler thoughts will reconcile them." The way to rule, is to serve; to do good, and stoop to do it; to become all things to all men, and so to win their hearts. Those in power really sit highest, and easiest, and safest, that do so. But the young men of his council advised him to return a severe and threatening answer to the people's demands. It was an instance of Rehoboam's weakness, to think that because they had been agreeable companions in the sports and pleasures of his youth, they were fit to have the management of the affairs of his kingdom. It is of great consequence to young people setting out in the world, to have suitable persons to associate with, accommodate themselves to, and depend upon for advice. If they reckon those who feed their pride, gratify their vanity, and further them in their pleasures, their best friends, they are already marked for ruin. Rehoboam answered the people

according to the counsel of the young men. Never, surely, was man so blinded by pride, and affectation of arbitrary power, than which nothing is more fatal. God's counsels were hereby fulfilled. It was from the Lord. He left Rehoboam to his own folly, and hid from his eyes the things which belonged to his peace, that the kingdom might be rent from him. God serves his own wise and righteous purposes by the imprudences and iniquities of men. They that lose the kingdom of heaven, throw it away, as Rehoboam did his, by wilfulness and folly.

11. The scorpion was a cruel instrument of punishment; it was a long bag of leather filled with sand, and stuck with spikes.—*Boothroyd.*

Ver. 16—24. *Ten tribes revolt—Rehoboam forbidden to attack them.*

Whether Rehoboam sent Adoram to demand the taxes of the people after their dispersion, as an attempt to enforce his threats; or whether he sent him with some proposals for an accommodation, to pacify them, does not appear. But whatever his experience or influence might be, his office rendered him a very improper person, and he lost his life in a popular tumult. The people were resolute in revolt. They speak unbecomingly of David. How soon are good men, and their good services to the public, forgotten! It is mentioned to the praise of the tribe of Judah, that they followed the house of David. Rehoboam was imprudent in the further management of this affair; more and more infatuated. God forbid his attempt to recover what he had lost by the sword. What was done, was of God. The thing must rest as it is, God forbids the battle. To proceed in this war, would be not only to fight against their brethren, whom they ought to love, but to fight against their God, to whom they ought to submit. This thing is from me. These two considerations should reconcile us to our losses and troubles, that God is the Author of them, and our brethren are the instruments; let us not therefore meditate revenge. Rehoboam and his people hearkened to the word of the Lord. When we know God's mind, we must submit, how much soever it crosses our own mind.

In all these circumstances, the parties acted freely, yet, as we have seen, were overruled by God in every step they took. As we know from experience that our

spirits act upon our bodies, so we may be equally assured on the testimony of God, that there is a spiritual influence exercised by him on the minds of his people. There is indeed a considerable difference in the mode of exercising it. In influencing the ungodly, He merely gives scope for the exercise of dispositions which already exist in their own minds; but in the godly he first infuses holy dispositions, then calls them into exercise by the operation of his own grace, strengthening the soul for the duties to which it is called. Do we not then see that if we secure the favour of God, not all the universe can hurt us?—(61.)

Ver. 25—33. *Jeroboam's idolatry.*

Jeroboam could not put confidence in the affections of his people: for what is got by wrong and usurpation, cannot be enjoyed or kept with any security or satisfaction. He distrusted the promise of God; he would contrive ways and means, and sinful ones too, for his own safety. A practical disbelief of God's all-sufficiency, is at the bottom of all our treacherous departures from him.

Leaning to his own understanding, he concluded that he never could secure the obedience of the people if they went up to Jerusalem to worship. Their friendly intercourse with their brethren, and joint worship, might induce them to return to David's family. His wicked policy broke the commandment of God. He pretended that it was too much trouble for the people to go to Jerusalem to worship, and that they might serve God as acceptably nearer home. He made two golden calves, perhaps in imitation of the idolatries he had witnessed in Egypt; or according to that of Israel in the wilderness. These he placed at the southern and northern extremities of his kingdom, at Bethel, afterwards called on that account Bethaven, or "the house of vanity," and at Dan, where the danites had established idolatry, Judges 18. Thus Jeroboam made Israel to sin, and introduced idolatry, which continued in the kingdom of Israel till the assyrian captivity. Though it is probable he meant this worship for Jehovah the God of Israel, it was directly contrary to the Divine law, and dishonourable to the Divine majesty, to be thus represented. The people might be less shocked at worshipping the God of Israel under a similitude, than if they had at once been invited to

worship Baal ; but it made way for that idolatry.

The people readily went to sacrifice at the appointed places, though sometimes it occasioned longer journeys than if they had gone to Jerusalem. Jeroboam appointed and consecrated priests of the poorest and most illiterate of the people, who would be the more subservient to him. He devised an entirely new system, but like unto the feasts that were in Judah. They that thought it much to go to Jerusalem, to worship God according to his institution, made no difficulty of going twice as far, to Dan, to worship him according to their own inventions. Or, they are said to go to one of the calves, at Dan, because Abijah, king of Judah, within twenty years, recovered Bethel, 2 Chron. 13. 19, and, it is likely, removed the golden calf, or forbade the use of it, and then only that at Dan remained.

Blessed Lord, give us grace to reverence thy temple, thine ordinances, thine house of prayer, thy sabbaths, and never more, like Jeroboam, to set up in our hearts any idol of abomination. Let every imagination be cast down, and every high thing that would exalt itself against the knowledge of God, be taken away, and let every thought be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Be thou to us every thing precious ; do thou reign and rule in our hearts, the hope of glory.—(37.)

(See 2 Chron. 10.)

CHAPTER XIII.

Ver. 1—10. *A prophet sent to Jeroboam, and his sin reprov'd.*

God often meets sinners in the midst of their crimes, with evident tokens of his displeasure, to convince them that their way is perverse before him. The army of Judah was countermanded, but a prophet of Judah is sent to reclaim Jeroboam from his evil way, and is sent in time, while he is but dedicating his altar, before his heart is hardened by the deceitfulness of his sin ; for God delights not in the death of sinners, but would rather they would turn, and live. The message was cried with a loud voice, denoting both the prophet's courage, and his earnestness. It is directed, not to Jeroboam, or to the people, but to the altar, the stones of which will sooner hear and yield, than they who were mad upon

their idols, and deaf to Divine calls ! Yet, in threatening the altar, he threatens the founder and worshippers. Let Jeroboam know, and be sure, that the altar he now consecrated, should be desecrated. Idolatrous worship will not continue, but the word of the Lord will endure for ever.

This prediction was delivered above three hundred years before Josiah was born, yet no one of the house of David gave or assumed this name, till the appointed time. This plainly declared that the family of David would continue, and support true religion, when the ten tribes would not be able to resist them. The burning of men's bones upon an altar was a mark of the greatest contempt ; slaying the priests showed God's abhorrence of their crimes, 2 Kings 23. 15—20. A sign is given for confirming the truth of this prediction, that the altar should be shaken to pieces by an invisible power, and the ashes of the sacrifice scattered, which came to pass immediately. This was a present indication of God's displeasure against these idolatrous sacrifices. Jeroboam's hand withered, which he stretched out to seize or smite the man of God, in defiance of the wrath of which he was warned, and in contempt of that grace which sent him the warning. Rebuke a sinner, and he will hate thee, and do thee a mischief if he can ; yet God's prophets must expose themselves rather than betray their trust. He that employs them will protect them, and restrain the wrath of man. God has many ways to disable the enemies of his church from executing mischievous purposes. Jeroboam's inability to pull in his hand, made him a spectacle to all about him, that they might see and fear. If God, in justice, harden the hearts of sinners, so that the hand they have stretched out in sin they cannot pull in again by repentance, that is a spiritual judgment, represented by this, and much more dreadful.

That word of God which should have touched Jeroboam's conscience, humbled him not ; but this which touched his bone and his flesh brings down his proud spirit. He looks for help now, not from his calves, but from God only, from his power, and his favour. He wounded, and no hand but his can make whole. Not by his own sacrifice or incense, but by the prayer and intercession of the prophet whom he had just now threatened, and aimed to destroy. The time may come when those

that hate the preaching, would be glad of the prayers of faithful ministers. But observe, Jeroboam does not desire him to pray that his sin might be pardoned, and his heart changed, but only that his hand might be restored. Thus Pharaoh would have Moses to pray that God would take away this death only, Exod. 10. 17, not this sin. When the prophet honoured God, by showing himself of a forgiving spirit, God put this further honour upon him, that, at his word, he recalled the judgment, and by another miracle healed the withered hand. Jeroboam seemed affected for the present with both the judgment and the mercy, but the impression wore off.

God forbade his messenger to eat or drink in Bethel, to show his detestation of their execrable idolatry and apostasy from God, and to teach us not to have fellowship with the works of darkness. He must not turn back the same way, but deliver his message as he passed along. God would, by this command, try his prophet, as he did Ezekiel, whether he would not be rebellious, like that rebellious house, Ezek. 2. 8. Though hungry and weary, and perhaps poor, in obedience to the Divine command, he refused both the entertainment and the reward proffered him. His acceptance of it would have given him an opportunity of discoursing further with the king, in order to his more effectual reformation; yet he will not think himself wiser than God, but, like a faithful, careful messenger, hastens home when he has done his errand. They have little learned the lesson of self-denial, that cannot forbear one forbidden meal.

Ver. 11—22. *The prophet deceived.*

The old prophet had continued to reside at Bethel, after idolatry was publicly established there, yet protested not against it, and his sons were present at the idolatrous sacrifice. His conduct gives convincing proof, that though called a prophet, he was not really a godly man. When the change took place under Jeroboam, he preferred his ease and interest to his religion. Yet he was desirous of the reputation of a prophet, as far as he could safely obtain it; and this appears to have been his leading motive in enticing the prophet of Judah back again, lest he should have been censured for not giving him some countenance. But whether he had any good design in fetching back the man of God, or a bad de-

sign to draw him into a snare, and so to expose him, for false prophets have ever been the worst enemies to the true prophets, it is certain that he took a very bad method to bring him back. It was all a lie. The good prophet suffered himself to be imposed upon. He went back with him. Believers are more in danger of being drawn from their duty by the plausible pretences of sanctity, than by external inducements; we have therefore need to beware of false prophets, and not to believe every spirit.

The good prophet was weary, which would give strength to the temptation; but as the command to him had been express, and he had only this man's word for what he said, his conduct was criminal, and likely to weaken the effect of his message upon the consciences of Jeroboam and his hearers. Doubtless his judgment was led aside by his inclination. But if a reputed prophet, an old prophet, who has appeared zealous for the truth, purchase security by conniving at prevailing abominations, he may well be suspected of hypocrisy.

We may wonder that the wicked prophet, who told the lie, and did the mischief, went unpunished, while the holy man of God, that was drawn by him into sin, was suddenly and severely punished for it. What shall we make of this? The judgments of God are unfathomable; the deceived and the deceiver are his, and he giveth not account of any of his matters; certainly there must be a judgment to come. The message delivered to the man of God was strange. Yet nothing can excuse any act of wilful disobedience. The sins of those who are employed of God are the most dishonourable to him. Such offenders, therefore, will not escape punishment in this world; perhaps their tempters will be employed to denounce or inflict the chastisement of the Lord upon them, while the wicked sometimes escape here, being reserved to the day of judgment to be punished. Of this we can give no account, but that God would have it so. And this shows what they must expect, who hearken to the great deceiver. They that yield to him as a tempter, will be terrified by him as a tormentor. Those whom he now fawns upon, he will afterward fly upon, and whom he draws into sin, he will do what he can to drive to despair.

20. The words here rendered, "That brought

him back," occur again, ver. 23, where they are rendered, "whom he had brought back." This appears the correct rendering, so that God delivered the sentence himself to the true prophet, speaking from heaven, as Gen. 22. 11: see also ver. 26.—*Kennicott.*

Ver. 23—34. *The prophet, disobeying God, is slain—Jeroboam's obstinacy.*

Here is the death of the deceived, disobedient prophet. Nothing is more provoking to God than disobedience to an express command, though in a small matter. Also this shows that God is displeased at the sins of his own people, and no man shall be protected in disobedience by the sanctity of his profession, the dignity of his office, his nearness to God, or any good services he has done for him. By this God warns all whom he employs strictly to observe their orders.

The lion devoured not the body, nor hurt the ass; and the old prophet was allowed, unmolested, to take away the body. These miraculous circumstances marked this death as a Divine rebuke for eating bread at idolatrous Bethel, and counteracted the conclusion which Jeroboam might have been tempted to draw from the prophet's death, against his message. The case was indeed lamentable, that a prophet so faithful, and so bold in God's cause, should, for one offence, die as a criminal, while an old lying prophet lives at ease, and an idolatrous prince in pomp and power. Thy way, O God, is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters. We cannot judge of men by their sufferings, nor of sins by their present punishments; with some, the flesh is destroyed, that the spirit may be saved; while with others the flesh is pampered, that the soul may ripen for hell. Happy are they who are habitually ready for death, even if the Lord should call them hence by a rebuke for some transgression, making them warnings to others!

The old prophet gave his sons charge concerning his own burial. He does honour to the deceased prophet, as one whose word would not fall to the ground, though he did. Ministers die, die prematurely it may be; but the word of the Lord endures for ever, and does not die with them. Many will show respect to the servants of the Lord, assent to their words, appear to lament their death, and wish to partake their lot in another world, who yet live and die impenitent. No mention is made here of the inscription on the prophet's tomb, spoken of, 2 Kings

23. 17; but the epitaph preserved the remembrance of his prophecy, and was a standing testimony against the idolatries of Bethel.

Jeroboam returned not from his evil way. Some hand was found that durst repair the altar God had rent, and then Jeroboam offered sacrifice on it again, and the more boldly. Various methods had been used to reclaim him, but he did not reform; not even his priesthood; but whoever would, he made him priest, though ever so illiterate or immoral, and of what tribe soever; and this became sin, that is, a snare first, and then a ruin to Jeroboam's house, to cut it off. The diminution, disquiet, and desolation of families, are the fruit of sin. Jeroboam promised himself that the calves would secure the crown to his family, but they lost it, and sunk his family. Those betray themselves who think to support themselves by any sin whatever. Let us take heed of hypocrisy; let us dread prospering in sinful ways; pray to be kept from every delusion and temptation, and to be enabled to walk with self-denying perseverance in the way of God's commands.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ver. 1—6. *Abijah being sick, his mother consults Ahijah the prophet.*

"At that time," when Jeroboam prostituted and profaned the priesthood, ch. 13. 33, his child sickened. When sickness comes into our families, we should inquire whether there be not some particular sin harboured in our houses, which the affliction is sent to convince us of, and reclaim us from. He sent his wife in disguise to inquire of Ahijah the prophet what should become of the child. It had been more pious if he had desired to know wherefore God contended with him, had begged the prophet's prayers, and cast away his idols from him; but most people would rather be told their fortune than their faults or their duty.

Jeroboam sent not to Ahijah for advice about the setting up of his calves, or the consecrating of his priests, but has recourse to him in his distress, when the gods he served could give him no relief. Lord, in trouble have they visited thee, who before slighted thee; some have by sickness been reminded of their forgotten ministers and praying friends. He sent

to Ahijah, because he had told him he should be king. He was once the messenger of good tidings, surely he will be so again—Those that by sin disqualify themselves for comfort, and yet expect that their ministers, because they are good men, should speak peace and comfort to them, greatly wrong both themselves and their ministers.

He sent his wife in disguise, to conceal herself, that the prophet might only answer her question concerning her son, and not enter upon the unpleasant subject of her husband's defection. Thus some people love to prescribe to their ministers, limit them to smooth things, and care not for having the whole counsel of God declared to them, lest it should prophesy no good concerning them, but evil. But what a strange notion had Jeroboam of God's prophet, that he believed he could and would certainly tell what would become of the child, and yet could not, or would not discover who the mother was. Be not deceived; God is not mocked. God gave Ahijah notice of the approach of Jeroboam's wife, and full instructions what to say. She shall know, at the first word, what she has to trust to; "I am sent to thee with heavy tidings." Those who think by their disguises to hide themselves from God, will be wretchedly confounded when they find themselves disappointed in the day of discovery. Sinners now appear in the garb of saints, and are taken to be such; but how will they blush and tremble when they find themselves stript of their false colours, and are called by their own name! Tidings of a portion with hypocrites will be heavy tidings; God will judge men according to what they are, not according to what they seem.

How God laughs in heaven at the frivolous fetches of crafty politicians! and when they think themselves most sure, he shames them with detection and defeat. What idleness it is for foolish hypocrites to hope they can dance in a net, unseen of Heaven!—(34.)

Ver. 7—20. *The destruction of Jeroboam's house foretold.*

The Lord, by his prophet, reminded Jeroboam of the great favour he had bestowed upon him in exalting him to be prince over God's chosen Israel, and taking the kingdom from the house of David, to bestow it upon him. Whether we keep an account of God's mercies to

us or not, he does, and will set them in order before us, if we are ungrateful, to our greater confusion; otherwise he gives, and upbraids not.

Ahijah charges him with his impiety and apostasy, and his idolatry particularly; Thou hast done evil above all that were before thee. Saul, that was rejected, never worshipped idols; Solomon did it but occasionally, in his dotage, and never made Israel to sin. Jeroboam's calves, though pretended to be set up in honour of the God of Israel, that brought them up out of Egypt, are here called other gods, or strange gods, because by them he changed the truth of God into a lie, and represented him as altogether different from what he is; and because many of the ignorant worshippers terminated their devotion in the image, and did not at all regard the God of Israel. He foretells the utter ruin of Jeroboam's house, ver. 10, 11. The king thought, by his idolatry, to establish his government, and by that he not only lost it, but brought destruction upon his family. Ahijah foretells the immediate death of the child that was now sick, in mercy to him. Observe the character given of him. He only in the house of Jeroboam had affection for the true worship of God, and disliked the worship of the calves. Those are good in whom are good things toward the Lord God of Israel; good inclinations, good intentions, good desires, toward him. When there is but "some good thing" of that kind, it will be found. God that seeks it, sees it, be it ever so little, and is pleased with it. Those who are good in bad times and places, shine very bright in the eyes of God. Abijah only of all Jeroboam's family shall die in honour; shall be buried, and lamented, as one whose life was desired. To show the power and sovereignty of his grace, God will have some out of the worst families, in whom there is "some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel." The righteous are removed from the evil to come in this world, to the good to come in a better world. It is often a bad omen to a family, when the best in it are buried out of it. When young persons, such as Abijah, are spared, they often prove blessings to their families and connexions, but their premature death forebodes awful judgments, and may well be mourned over as a public calamity. Yet their death never can be a loss to themselves. It was a present

affliction to the family and kingdom, by which both ought to have been instructed. It aggravated the poor mother's grief, that she should not reach home time enough to see her son alive. When thy feet enter into the city, just then the child shall die. This was to be a sign to her of the accomplishment of the rest of the threatenings, as 1 Sam. 2. 34.

God foretells the setting up another family to rule over Israel. But when? Even now. Why do I speak of it as a thing at a distance? It is at the door; it shall be done even now. Sometimes God makes quick work with sinners; he did so with the house of Jeroboam. It was not twenty-four years from his first elevation to the extirpation of his family. God also tells the judgments which should come upon the people of Israel, for conforming to the worship Jeroboam established. They should never be easy, nor rightly settled in their land, but continually shaken like a reed in the water. After they left the house of David, the government never continued long in one family, but one undermined and destroyed another, which occasioned great disorders among the people. They should ere long be totally expelled out of that good land, and given up to ruin. This was fulfilled in the captivity of the ten tribes by the king of Assyria. Families and kingdoms are ruined by sin, ruined by the wickedness of their heads. Jeroboam did sin, and made Israel to sin. If great men do wickedly, they involve many others, both in the guilt and in the snare; multitudes follow their pernicious ways. Their condemnation will be more intolerable, who must answer, not only for their own sins, but for sins which others have been drawn into, and kept in, by their influence.

19. Not the canonical book of the Chronicles, for that was written after this book, but a book of civil records, the annals wherein all remarkable passages were recorded by the king's command, out of which the sacred penmen, by the direction of God's Spirit, took those passages which were most considerable and useful for God's honour and man's edification.—*Poole*.

Ver. 21—31. *Rehoboam's wicked reign and death.*

Here is no good said of Rehoboam. His mother was Naamah, an ammonitess; this is twice mentioned. It was strange that David would marry his son Solomon to an ammonitess, for it was done while

he lived; but she was Naamah, a beauty, so it signifies. None can imagine how lasting and how fatal the consequences may be, of being unequally yoked with unbelievers. Rehoboam having been born before David's death, had his education in the best years of his father's reign, and so had abundant opportunity of becoming a wiser man than he proved to be.

Here is much said to the disadvantage of the subjects, both as to their character and their condition. A most sad account is here given of their apostasy from God. The abounding of the worst crimes, of the worst of the heathen, in Jerusalem, the city that the Lord had chosen for his temple and worship, shows that nothing can mend the hearts of fallen man but the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit. On this alone may we depend; for this may we daily pray, in behalf of ourselves and all around us. They did abominable things, above all that their fathers had done. The magnificence of their temple, the pomp of their priesthood, and all the secular advantages with which their religion was attended, could not prevail to keep them close to it; nothing less than the pouring out the Spirit from on high will keep God's Israel in their allegiance to him. This account of the wickedness of the jews, agrees with that which the apostle gives of the wickedness of the gentile world, Rom. 1. 21, 24; so that both jew and gentile are all alike under sin, Rom. 3. 9. They became vain in their imaginations concerning God, and changed his glory into an image; for they built them high-places, images, and groves, profaning God's name, by affixing it to their images, and God's ordinances, by serving their idols with them. They were given up to vile affections, as those idolaters, Rom. 1. 26, 27. And when they did like those who were cast out, how could they expect any other than to be cast out like them? See here how weak and poor they were. Sin exposes, impoverishes, and weakens any people. Shishak, king of Egypt, came against them, and took away the treasures both of the house of the Lord, and of the king's house, which David and Solomon had amassed. He also took away the golden shields; and, instead of them, Rehoboam made brazen shields, which the life-guard carried before him. This was an emblem of the diminution of his glory.

Sin makes the gold become dim, changes the most fine gold, and turns it into brass.

(*Read 2 Chron. 11. 12.*)

CHAPTER XV.

Ver. 1—8. *Wicked reign of Abijam king of Judah.*

A short account is given of the short reign of Abijam, the son of Rehoboam, king of Judah. There is a more full account, 2 Chron. 13. He began his reign in Jeroboam's eighteenth year. He reigned scarcely three years. The king's mother was Maachah, the daughter of Absalom, David's son. He carried on his father's wars with Jeroboam; not set battles, which were forbidden, ch. 12. 24, but frequent encounters, one making incursions and the other reprisals, till Jeroboam with a great army invaded Abijam, who not being forbidden to act in his own defence, routed and weakened him so, that he compelled Jeroboam to be quiet the rest of his reign, 2 Chron. 13. 20.

Abijam's heart was not perfect with the Lord his God; he wanted sincerity; he began well, but he fell off, and walked in all the sins of his father, followed his bad example, though he had seen the bad consequence of it. Let favour be showed the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness, Isa. 26. 10. For David's sake he was advanced, and continued upon the throne. But it aggravates the sin of a degenerate seed, that they fare the better for the piety of their ancestors, and owe their blessings to it, yet will not imitate that of which they enjoy the benefit. The kingdom of Judah was supported, that David might have a lamp, pursuant to the Divine ordination, Psa. 132. 17. His family was continued as a lamp in Jerusalem; they were useful to preserve that city to after-times, and to maintain the true worship of God there, when the light of Divine truth was extinguished in all other places. The Lord hath still taken care of his cause, while those who ought to have been serviceable thereto have lived and perished in their sins. The Son of David will still continue a light to his church, to establish it in truth and righteousness to the end of time. The character here given of David is very great—he did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, but

the exception is very remarkable—save only in the matter of Uriah. Doubtless every thing he did was defective, but only in this instance did he act utterly inconsistent with his profession. That was a blot remaining upon his name, and the reproach of it was not wiped away, though the guilt was. David was guilty of other faults; yet even that, being repented of, though mentioned for warning to others, did not throw him out of the covenant, nor cut off the promise from his seed.

There are two kinds of fulfilling the law, one *legal* the other *evangelical*. Legal is when men do all things required in the law, and that by themselves, and in themselves. None ever thus fulfilled the law but Christ, and Adam before his fall. The evangelical manner of fulfilling the law is, to believe in Christ who fulfilled the law for us, and to endeavour in the whole man to obey God in all his precepts. And this endeavour, joined with the purpose of not sinning, is called the righteousness of a good conscience, and it is accepted of God as a fulfilling of the law, in all them that are in Christ. Thus David and others are said to fulfil the law.—(56.)

(*Read 2 Chron. 13.*)

Ver. 9—24. *Good reign of Asa, king of Judah.*

In the accounts of the kings of Judah we find the number of the good and the bad kings nearly equal; but we may observe, that the reign of the good kings was generally long, and that of the bad kings short; the consideration of which will make the state of God's church not altogether so bad, within that period, as at first sight it appears.

Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. That is right indeed which is so in God's eyes. He did as did David his father, kept close to God, and to his instituted worship. If we come up to the graces of those who are gone before us, it will be our praise with God, though we come short of their gifts. His times were times of reformation. He removed that which was evil—there reformation begins—and a great deal he found to do. For though it was but twenty years after the death of Solomon, yet very gross corruption had spread far, and taken deep root. Immorality he first struck at; how can either prince or people prosper, while cages of unclean and filthy birds, more dangerous than pest-houses,

are suffered to remain? Then he proceeded against idolatry; he removed all the idols, even those that his father had made. His father having made them, he was the more concerned to remove them, that he might prevent the visiting of that iniquity upon him and his. When Asa found idolatry in the court, he rooted it out thence. Reformation must begin at home. Asa, in every thing else, honours and respects his mother; he loves her well, but he loves God better, and, like the levite, Deut. 33. 9, forgets the relation, when it comes in competition with his duty. If his mother, or rather his grandmother, be an idolater, her idol shall be destroyed, publicly exposed to contempt. Let no remains of a court idol appear. She shall be deposed. He removed her from being queen, or from the queen; he confined her to a private life. They that have power, are happy when thus they have hearts to use it well. He re-established that which was good. He brought into the house of God the dedicated things he had vowed out of the spoils of the ethiopians, and which his father had vowed. We must not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well; not only cast away the idols of our iniquity, but dedicate ourselves and our all to God's honour and glory. He built cities to encourage the increase of his people. And he was very zealous to hinder Baasha from building Ramah, because he designed it for the cutting off of communication between his people and Jerusalem, to hinder those who, in obedience to God, would come to worship there.

Yet in both the things for which he was praised he was found defective. Did he take away the idols? That was well; but the high-places were not removed; therein his reformation fell short. He removed all images which were rivals with the true God, or false representations of him; but the altars set up in high-places, and to which those sacrifices were brought, which should have been offered on the altar in the temple, those he suffered to stand. It was not well that Asa did not remove these; nevertheless his heart was perfect with the Lord. This expression is opposed to the outward good behaviour, but insincere and divided heart of hypocrites, and signifies that he was cordially devoted to the service of God, his sins not arising

from presumption. Did he bring in the dedicated things? That was well; but he afterward alienated the dedicated things, when he took the gold and silver out of the house of God, and sent them as a bribe to Benhadad, to hire him to break his league with Baasha, and divert him from building Ramah. But though the design prospered, we find it was displeasing to God; and though Asa valued himself upon the policy of it, and promised himself that it would secure his peace, he is told by a prophet that he had done foolishly, and that from thenceforth he should have wars: see 2 Chron. 16. This league with Benhadad arose from unbelief. Even true believers find it hard in times of urgent danger, to trust in the Lord with all their heart, and not to lean to their own understanding; unbelief makes way for carnal policy, and thus for one sin after another. Unbelief has often induced christians to call in the help of the Lord's enemies in their contests with their brethren; and to spend that time and substance in obtaining their favour which ought to have been dedicated to the Lord's service. Such victories weaken the cause of religion, and end in shame and bitterness; some who once shone bright, have thus been covered with a dark cloud towards the end of their days.

For the most part Asa prospered; but Baasha king of Israel was a very troublesome neighbour to him, and all his days had war, more or less, with Asa. This was the effect of the division of the kingdoms, that they were continually vexing one another, which made them both an easier prey to the common enemy. In his old age Asa was himself diseased in his feet, which made him less fit for business, and peevish toward those about him. Notice the conclusion of his reign. The acts of it were more largely recorded in the common history than in this sacred one. He reigned long, but finished at last with honour, and left his throne to a successor no way inferior to him.

13. The king's mother was a title of dignity, not always confined to the immediate parent of the reigning monarch: see *Carpenter*.

(*Read 2 Chron. 14. 15. 16.*)

Ver. 25—34. *The evil reigns of Nadab and Baasha in Israel.*

We are now to take a view of the miserable state of Israel, while the kingdom

of Judah was happy under Asa's good government. It was threatened that they should be as a reed shaken in the water, ch. 14. 15, and so they were. During the single reign of Asa, the government of their kingdom was in six or seven different hands. Here is the ruin and extirpation of the family of Jeroboam, according to the word of the Lord by Ahijah. His son Nadab succeeded him. If the example and the death of his brother Abijah had influenced him, to make him religious, and follow his good example, his reign might have been long and glorious; but he walked in the way of his father, kept up the worship of his calves, and forbade his subjects to go to Jerusalem to worship. He sinned and made Israel to sin, therefore God brought ruin upon him quickly, in the second year of his reign. Baasha, with others, conspired against him and killed him in the midst of his army; and so little had he the affections of his people, that his army chose his murderer for his successor. The first thing Baasha did, when he came to the crown, was to cut off all the house of Jeroboam, that he might the better secure himself, and his own usurped government, as was foretold, ch. 14. 10. Herein he was barbarous, but God was righteous. Jeroboam's sin was punished, for they that provoke God, do it to their own confusion: see Jer. 7. 19. Ahijah's prophecy was accomplished, for no word of God shall fall to the ground. Divine threatenings are not designed merely to terrify.

Baasha was tried a while, as Jeroboam was. Twenty-four years he reigned, but showed that it was not from dislike to Jeroboam's sin that he destroyed his family; but from malice and ambition; for when he had rooted out the sinner, he himself clave to the sin, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, though he had seen the end of that way: so strangely was his heart hardened with the deceitfulness of sin. Thus ungodly men execute the just judgments of God upon each other, while gratifying their own ambition, avarice, or revenge; and at the same time they are ripening for vengeance by imitating the crimes of those they have supplanted. But in the midst of these enormities and this apparent confusion, the Lord is carrying on his universal plan: when it is fully completed, the glorious justice, wisdom, truth, and mercy therein displayed,

shall be admired and adored through all the ages of eternity.

CHAPTER XVI.

Ver. 1—14. *Revolutions in Israel—The reigns of Baasha and Elah in Israel.*

This chapter relates wholly to the kingdom of Israel, and the revolutions of that kingdom. Baasha was active, politic, and daring; but he was an idolater, and that brought destruction upon his family. God sent him warning by Jehu the son of Hanani. The father was a seer, or prophet, at the same time, 2 Chron. 16. 7. He was sent to Asa king of Judah; but the son was sent on this longer and more dangerous expedition to Baasha king of Israel. This Jehu continued long in his usefulness, for we find him reproving Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. 19. 2, above forty years after, and writing the annals of that prince, 2 Chron. 20. 34. The message this prophet brought to Baasha, is much the same with that Ahijah sent to Jeroboam by his wife. 1. He reminds him of the great things God had done for him. Baasha seemed to have raised himself by his own treachery and cruelty, yet there was the hand of Providence in it, to bring about God's counsel concerning Jeroboam's house: and God's owning his advancement as his act and deed, was by no means patronizing his ambition and treachery. God calls Israel his people still, though wretchedly corrupted. It was not till long after that they were called Loammi, not a people, Hos. 1. 9. 2. He charges him that he had made Israel to sin. Herein he had walked in the way of Jeroboam, and had been like his house. He had himself provoked God to anger by worshipping images: thereby he avowed making them, and they are therefore called the work of his hands. He had destroyed the house of Jeroboam. Those employed in denouncing or executing the justice of God, magistrates or ministers, are concerned to do it from a good principle, and in a holy manner, lest it turn into sin to them, and they make themselves obnoxious by it. Jehu foretells the same destruction to come upon Baasha's family, which he had been employed to bring upon the family of Jeroboam. Those who resemble others in their sins, may expect to resemble them in the plagues they suffer, especially those who seem zealous against such sins in others, as they allow themselves.

Baasha himself dies in peace, and is buried with honour. The manner in which chief offenders often escape, while their children, relatives, or helpers suffer for their crimes, declares the approach of the day of judgment, and the exact discrimination of characters, with the distribution of rewards and punishments which shall then take place. Herein would appear a tacit intimation—That there are punishments after death, when death has done its worst, which will be the sorest punishments, and most to be dreaded.

Baasha's son, Elah, reigned two years, and then was slain by Zimri, when drinking himself drunk. Let it be a warning to drunkards, especially to those who designedly drink themselves drunk, that they know not but death may surprise them in that condition. Death *easily* comes upon men, when they are drunk; beside the various diseases which men frequently bring themselves into by hard drinking, and which cut them off in the midst of their days, men, in that condition, are more easily overcome by an enemy, and are more liable to bad accidents, being unable to help themselves. Death comes *terribly* upon men in such a state, finding them in the act of sin, and incapacitated for any act of devotion; that day comes upon them unawares, Luke 21. 34, like a thief.

The first thing Zimri did, was to slay all the house of Baasha; his cruelty seems to have extended further than Baasha's against the house of Jeroboam, for he left to Elah none of his kinsfolk or friends, "none of his avengers," so the word is, none likely to avenge his death; yet Divine justice soon avenged it so remarkably, that it was used as a proverb long after, Had Zimri peace that slew his master? 2 Kings 9. 31. In this the word of God was fulfilled, and the sins of Baasha and Elah were reckoned for, with which they provoked God by their vanities. Their idols are called their vanities, for they cannot profit nor help; miserable are those whose gods are vanities.

Ver. 15--28. *Reigns of Zimri and Omri in Israel.*

When men forsake God, they will be left to plague one another, they are out of the way of rest and establishment. Proud aspiring men ruin one another, and involve others in the ruin. These confusions ended in the settlement of Omri. Zimri is said to have reigned seven days, so long before Omri was proclaimed king,

and himself proclaimed a traitor; but we may suppose it a longer time before he died, for he continued long enough to show his inclination to the way of Jeroboam, and to make himself obnoxious to the justice of God, by supporting his idolatry. Tirzah was a beautiful city, but not fortified, so that Omri soon made himself master of it, forced Zimri into the palace, which, being unable to defend, and yet unwilling to surrender, he burnt, and himself in it. See what desperate practices men's wickedness sometimes brings them to, and how it hurries them into their own ruin.

Omri struggled with Tibni; the contest between them lasted some years. Though we do not always understand the rules by which God governs nations and individuals in his providence, we may draw some general conclusions of practical utility, from the history before us. When tyrants rapidly succeed each other, with massacres, conspiracies, and civil wars, we may be sure the Lord hath a controversy with the people for their sins; they are loudly called to repentance and reformation.

When Omri was at length settled on the throne, he made himself famous by building Samaria, which, ever after, was the royal city of the kings of Israel, and in time gave name to the middle part of Canaan, between Galilee on the north, and Judea on the south, and the inhabitants of that country were called samaritans. The kings of Israel changed their royal seats; Shechem first, then Tirzah, now Samaria; but the kings of Judah were constant to Jerusalem, the city of God: they that cleave to the Lord, fix; they that leave him, ever wander. Omri made himself infamous by his wickedness. Many wicked men have been men of might and renown; have built cities, and perpetuated their memories in history, but have no name in the book of life. Though Omri was brought to the throne with much difficulty, and Providence had remarkably favoured him in his advancement, yet he was more profane, or more superstitious, and a greater persecutor, than either of the houses of Jeroboam or Baasha. He went further, in establishing iniquity by a law, and forcing his subjects to comply with it; for we read of the statutes of Omri, the keeping of which made Israel a desolation, Mic. 6. 16. Jeroboam made Israel to sin, by temptation, example, and allurements; but Omri

did it by compulsion. He died in his bed, as Jeroboam and Baasha did also; but, like them, left it to his posterity to fill up the measure, and then receive the punishment of his iniquity.

Ver. 29—34. *Ahab succeeds to the throne of Israel—His wickedness—Hiel rebuilds Jericho.*

We have the beginning of the reign of Ahab, of whom we have more particulars recorded than of any other of the kings of Israel. He did evil above all that reigned before him, and did it with a particular enmity both against Jehovah and Israel. It was bad with the people, when their kings were each worse than the others; what would they come to at last! He had seen the ruin of other wicked kings and their families; yet, instead of taking warning, his heart was hardened against God by it. He thought it a light thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam. He was not satisfied with breaking the second commandment by image-worship, he set aside the first also by introducing other gods; making light of lesser sins makes way for greater; they that endeavour to extenuate other people's sins, will but aggravate their own.

Marriages with daring offenders imbolden the mind in wickedness, and hurry men on to the greatest excesses. Ahab took to wife Jezebel, a zealous idolater, extremely imperious and malicious in her natural temper, and every way vicious. The false prophetess, spoken of Rev. 2. 20, is there called Jezebel, for a wicked woman could not be called by a worse name than hers: we shall find what mischiefs she did, and what mischief, at last, befell her. He set up the worship of Baal, forsook the God of Israel, and served the god of the sidonians, Jupiter instead of Jehovah; the sun, so some think; a deified hero of the phœnicians, so others. He was weary of the golden calves; such vanities were they, that those who had been most fond of them, at length were disgusted with them. In honour of this mock deity, Ahab built a temple in Samaria, the royal city; he would have Baal's temple near him, that he might frequent, protect, and honour it. He reared an altar in that temple, on which to sacrifice to Baal, by which the offerers acknowledged dependence upon him, and sought his favour. Oh the stupidity of idolaters, who are at a great expense to make that befriend them which they might have chosen whether they would

have made a god or not! He made a grove about his temple; something that answered to conceal, and so to countenance the abominable impurities committed in the filthy worship of Baal. He that doeth evil hateth the light.

One of his subjects, in imitation of his presumption, ventured to build Jericho, in defiance of the curse Joshua had pronounced five hundred years before on him that should attempt it. It is an instance of the height of impiety men were then arrived at, especially at Bethel, where one of the calves was set up, for of that city this daring sinner was. Observe, like Achan, he meddled with the accursed thing, turned that to his own use, which was devoted to God's honour: he began to build, in defiance of the curse well known in Israel. He went on to build, in defiance of the execution of the curse in part; for though his eldest son died when he began, yet he proceeded in contempt of God, and his wrath revealed from heaven against his ungodliness. His eldest son died when he began, the youngest, when he finished, and all the rest, it is supposed, between. Those whom God curses, are cursed indeed; none ever hardened his heart against God, and prospered. May God keep us back from presumptuous sins, those great transgressions!

Let the reading of this chapter cause us carefully to mark the dreadful end of all the workers of iniquity. And what does the history of all ungodly men furnish, whatever rank or situation they move in, but sad examples of the same? What is the wretched effect of carnal pursuits in the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life, but the hire, the wages, the sure reward of the sorrow that must follow? Are not all such characters, however different in their occupations and pursuits, treasuring up to themselves misery in this life, and endless sorrow in that which is to come? Are not these like the stipulated wages of the hireling and the servant, which he expects and will have at the end of his labour? Blessed Saviour! how refreshing the thought to thy people, that thou hast brought them out of the service of Satan, and made them free in thy service! Thou graciously didst search for them while they were children of wrath, and wandering far from thee. And now, having brought them, by the enlightening and

conviction of thy Holy Spirit, into the bond of the covenant, thou preservest them from falling into the depths of sin that swallow up the ungodly. Blessed Lord! be thou our Guide, our Keeper, and our supreme Joy; so sin shall not have dominion over us, nor the vanities of the world draw us into perdition.—(37)

34. Some consider that the curse attached only to the rebuilding of the walls, and that Jericho had been previously inhabited as an un-walled town.

CHAPTER XVII.

Ver. 1—7. *Elijah having prophesied against Ahab, king of Israel, is fed by ravens.*

This illustrious prophet is brought to our notice in an abrupt manner. We are not informed of his parentage, education, or previous manner of life. He is called the tishbite, but is not agreed whether this was from the place where he lived, or from his being the reformer of Israel, for the word signifies a converter. He was of the inhabitants of Gilead beyond Jordan. His name signifies, "The Lord my God is he:" not only the true God, in opposition unto idols; but that God who would stand by him in the perilous services to which he was called.

The apostle has assured us that Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, James 5. 17, which perhaps intimates not only that he was liable to the common infirmities of the human nature, but that, by his natural temper, he was a man of strong passions. God wonderfully suits men to the work he designs them for; rough spirits are called to rough services; the reformation needed such a man as Luther. Great intrepidity and resolution are necessary for those employed to stop the torrent of prevailing iniquity, or to declare God's message before persecuting tyrants; he that sends them will qualify and support them for such services.

The times were fit for an Elijah; an Elijah was fit for them. The Spirit of God knows how to proportion men for the occasions. Next after Moses, there was no Old Testament prophet more glorious than he; none more glorious, none more obscure. It matters not whose son he is, whom God will grace with his service.—(34.)

Elijah foretold a long and grievous famine, with which Israel should be punished for their sins. That fruitful land, for want of rain, should be turned into

barrenness for the iniquity of them that dwelt therein. He did not whisper it to the people, to make them disaffected to the government, but proclaimed it to the king, in whose power it was to reform the land, and so to prevent the judgment. There should be neither dew nor rain for some years, none but according to my word, that is, Expect none till you hear from me again. The apostle teaches us to understand this, not only of the word of prophecy, but of the word of prayer, James 5. 17, 18. He prayed earnestly, in holy indignation at Israel's apostasy, and holy zeal for the glory of God, whose judgments were defied, that it might not rain; according to his prayers, the heavens became brass, till he prayed that it might rain. There is allusion to this, Rev. 11. 6. Elijah let Ahab know, that, notwithstanding the present peace and prosperity of the kingdom, God was displeased with their idolatry, and would chastise them by the want of rain, which it was not in the power of the gods they served to bestow: for are there any of the vanities of the heathen, that can give rain? Jer. 14. 22. This would effectually prove the folly of those who left the living God, to make court to such as could do neither good nor evil. See the power of prayer, and the truth of God's word; for he performeth the counsel of his messengers.

The Lord's hand is not shortened. Though the ministers of his gospel cannot now command the sun with Joshua, nor the thunder with Samuel, nor the rain with Elijah, let it content them if they can fix the Sun of righteousness to shine in the souls of men, if they can thunder out the judgments of God against sin, if they can water the earthen hearts of men with the former and latter reign of heavenly doctrine.—(34.)

Elijah was commanded to hide himself, not only to avoid the persecuting rage of Ahab, instigated by Jezebel, but as an additional judgment upon the israelites. The Lord did not intend to shorten the term of the calamity; therefore he would have his servant placed out of the way, that he might not be solicited to pray for it. He was secluded from society and from usefulness, but was engaged in communion with God, and in prayers for the reformation of his people. The brook Cherith ran into the river Jordan, but the place was retired, neither

friends nor foes knew where he was. If Providence calls us to solitude and retirement, it becomes us to acquiesce; when we cannot be useful, we must be patient, and when we cannot work for God, we must sit still quietly for him. He is in the way of his duty, and verily he shall be fed; in the day of famine he shall be satisfied. Elijah must drink of the brook, and the ravens were appointed to bring him meat, and did so. Let those who have but from hand to mouth, learn to live upon Providence, and trust it for the bread of the day, in the day; thank God for bread this day, and let to-morrow bring bread with it. God could have sent angels to minister to him, as afterward, ch. 19. 5, and as to our Saviour, Matt. 4. 11, but he chose to show that he can serve his own purposes by the meanest creatures as effectually as by the mightiest.

Ravens feed on insects and carrion themselves, yet they brought the prophet man's meat, and wholesome food. It is pity that those who bring the bread of life to others, should themselves take up with that which is not bread. Ravens are themselves fed by special providence, Job 38. 41; Psa. 147. 9, and now they feed the prophet. Have we experienced God's special goodness to us and ours? let us reckon ourselves obliged, thereby, to be kind to those that are his, for his sake. Let us learn from hence to acknowledge the sovereignty and power of God over all the creatures; he can make what use he pleases of them, either for judgment or mercy. Let us encourage ourselves in God, in the greatest straits, and never distrust him. Ravens seemed more likely to prey upon and rob the prophet, than to bring him food. But God's command suspended their natural instinct, and made them act contrary to it. We need not inquire how the food was prepared. He who commanded them to feed his servant could enable them to fulfil his word.

Elijah seems to have continued in this situation above a year. The natural supply of water which came by common providence failed him; but the miraculous supply of food, insured to him by promise, failed not. The powers of nature are limited, but not the powers of the God of nature. If the heavens fail, earth fails of course; such are all our creature-comforts: we lose them when we most need them, like the brooks in summer, Job 6. 15. But there is a river which makes glad

the city of God; that never runs dry, Psa. 46. 4, a well of water that springs up to eternal life; Lord, give us that living water!

1. All that is necessary to understand by the expressions, "there shall be no dew nor rain," is, that they should not be in the usual, in the necessary quantities. Such a suspension of rain and dew would answer the chastising purposes of God; and an absolute drought of three years' continuance must have destroyed all the trees of the country, as well as have occasioned a universal famine.—*Harmer*.

4. Some interpreters consider that the word "orebim," here translated "ravens," should have been rendered arabs, or inhabitants of Oreb, Judg. 7. 25. This is supported by the arabic version, and by Jerome. See *T. H. Horne*. As, however, many events in Elijah's life were miraculous, we need not attempt to explain this by having recourse to ordinary causes. The original word cannot properly be translated otherwise than it is in our version.—*Greenfield*. He also notices Obadiah's declaration, ch. 18. 10, that Ahab had taken an oath respecting Elijah from every neighbouring people; and if a people had supplied him with food, they could have brought him water, so that he need not have left the place of his concealment because the brook dried up.

Ver. 8—16. *Elijah sent to the widow of Zarephath, and miraculously sustained there.*

We have here an account of the further protection Elijah was taken under, and the further provision made for him, in his retirement. When the brook was dried up, Jordan was not; why did not God send him thither? Surely, because he would show that he has a variety of ways to provide for his people, and is not tied to any one. God will now provide for him where he shall have some company, and opportunity of usefulness. The place he is sent to is Zarephath, or Sarepta, a city of Sidon, out of the borders of the land of Israel. Our Saviour takes notice of this as an early and ancient indication of the favour of God designed for the poor gentiles, in the fulness of time, Luke 4. 25, 26. Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, and some, it is likely, would have bidden him welcome to their houses; yet he is sent to honour and bless with his presence a city of Sidon, a gentile city, and so becomes the first prophet of the gentiles. Israel corrupted themselves with the idolatries of the nations, and were become worse than they; justly, therefore, is the casting of them off the riches of the world. Elijah was hated and driven out by his countrymen, therefore he turns to the gentiles, as the apostles were afterward ordered to do, Acts 18. 6. But why to a city of Sidon? The worship of Baal, which

was now the crying sin of Israel, came lately from thence with Jezebel, who was a sidonian, ch. 16. 31. Jezebel was Elijah's greatest enemy; yet, to show her the impotency of her malice, God will find a hiding-place for him even in her country! Christ never went among the gentiles, except once into Sidon, Matt. 15. 21.

The person appointed to entertain Elijah, is not one of the rich or great men of Sidon: but a poor widow woman, destitute and desolate, is commanded, that is, is made both able and willing to sustain him. It is God's way, and it is his glory, to make use of, and put honour upon the weak and foolish things of the world. He is, in a special manner, the widows' God, and feeds them; they must study what they shall render to him.

Providence brought the widow woman to meet him at the gate of the city. It appears, 1. That she was very poor. She had nothing to live upon, but a handful of meal and a little oil; needy at the best, and now, by the general scarcity, reduced to the last extremity. When she has eaten the little she has, for aught she yet sees, she and her son must die for want. She appeared more likely to crave alms than give entertainment; to her Elijah is sent, that he might still live upon Providence, as much as he did when the ravens fed him; and it was in compassion to the low estate of his handmaiden, that God sent the prophet to her. 2. She was humble and industrious. Elijah found her quietly gathering sticks, and preparing to bake the last morsel of her bread, ver. 10, 12. Her mind was brought to her condition, and she complains not of the hardship she was brought to, nor quarrels with the Divine Providence for withholding rain: such as are of this temper, in a day of trouble, are best prepared for honour and relief from God. 3. She was very charitable and generous. When this stranger desired her to go fetch him some water to drink, she readily went, at the first word. She objected not the present scarcity of it, nor hinted that he was a stranger, John 4. 9. She did not excuse herself on account of her weakness, or the urgency of her own affairs; but left gathering sticks for herself, to fetch water for him. We should be ready to do any office of kindness, even to strangers. If we have not wherewith to give to the distressed, we must be the more

ready to work for them. A cup of cold water, though it cost us no more than the labour of fetching, shall, in no wise, lose its reward. 4. She had great confidence in the word of God. It was a great trial of her faith and obedience, when, having told the prophet how low her stock of meal and oil was, he bade her make a cake for him, and make his first. But she got over all objections, and obeyed the precept, in dependence upon the promise. She went and did according to the saying of Elijah, ver. 15. O woman, great was thy faith; one has not found the like, no not in Israel. She took the prophet's word, that she should not lose by it. Those who can venture upon the promise of God, will make no difficulty to expose and empty themselves in his service, by giving him his part first. Surely the increase of this widow's faith, so as to enable her thus readily to deny herself, and to depend upon the Divine promise, was as great a miracle in the kingdom of grace, as the increase of her oil in the kingdom of providence. Happy are all who can thus, against hope, believe, and obey in hope.

Never did corn or olive so increase in the growing, says bishop Hall, as these did in the using; but the multiplying of the seed sown, 2 Cor. 9. 10, in the common course of Providence, is an instance of the power and goodness of God, not to be overlooked because common. The meal and the oil multiplied, not in hoarding but in spending; for there is that scattereth, yet increaseth. When God blesses a little, it will go a great way, even beyond expectation; as, on the contrary, though there be abundance, if he blow upon it, it comes to little, Hag. 1. 9—11; 2. 16. This was a maintenance for the prophet, and for the poor widow and her son, as well as a recompence to her for entertaining the prophet. There is nothing lost by being kind to God's people and ministers.

Christ has promised to those who open their doors to him, that he will come in, and sup with them, and they with him, Rev. 3. 20. Like Elijah, he brings to those who bid him welcome, not only his own entertainment, but theirs also. When Abraham offers his only son to God, he is told he shall be the father of multitudes: what is laid out in piety or charity, is put out to the best interest,

upon the best security. One poor meal's meat this poor widow gave the prophet; in recompence of it, she and her son did eat above two years, in a time of general scarcity. To have food from God's special favour, and to eat it in such good company as Elijah, made it more than doubly sweet. It is promised to them that trust in God, that they shall not be ashamed in evil time; in days of famine they shall be satisfied, Psa. 37. 19.

Ver. 17—24. *Elijah raises the widow's son to life.*

A further recompence was made to the widow for her kindness to the prophet. Her son, when dead, is restored to life, and so restored to her. He was fed miraculously, yet that did not secure him from sickness and death; but there is Bread of which a man may eat and not die, which was given for the life of the world, John 6. 50, 51. This widow had strong reason to think the Lord would do her good; yet she lost her child. We must not think it strange, if we meet with very sharp afflictions, even when we are in the way of duty, and of eminent service to God. Neither faith nor obedience exclude afflictions and death. When we have the clearest manifestations of God's favour and good-will, even then we must prepare for the rebukes of Providence. Our mountain never stands so strong, but it may be moved, and in this world, we must always rejoice with trembling.

The child being dead, the mother expostulated with the prophet, rather as a vent to sorrow, than in hope of relief. How calmly she spoke of her own, and her child's death, when she expected to die for want! yet now that her child dies, and not so miserably as by famine, she is extremely disturbed: we speak lightly of an affliction at a distance, but when it touches us, we are troubled, Job 4. 5. It is hard to avoid impatience, and to exercise unshaken faith, when troubles come upon us unexpectedly, in the midst of peace and prosperity. Yet she expressed herself penitently; Art thou come to call my sin to thy remembrance, as the cause of the affliction, and so to call it to my remembrance, as the effect of the affliction? When God removes our comforts from us, he remembers our sins against us, perhaps the iniquities of our youth, though long since past, Job 13. 26. When God remembers our sins

against us, he designs to make us remember them against ourselves, and repent of them.

The prophet humbly reasons with God concerning the death of the child, and earnestly begs of God to restore the child to life again. We do not read, before this, of any that were raised to life; yet Elijah, by Divine impulse, prays for the resurrection of this child, but that will not warrant us to do the like. David expected not, by fasting and prayer, to bring his child back to life, 2 Sam. 12. 23, but Elijah had power to work miracles, which David had not.

Elijah's actions denoted the earnestness of his desires, and his expectations of the child's restoration to life. He would, if possible, have communicated his own life to him. The expression, Let the child's soul come into him again, not only intimates the prophet's certainty that he was really dead, but marks the distinction between the soul and the body to be as real, as that betwixt the house and its inhabitants. Elijah's petition was doubtless directed by immediate inspiration. The child revived. See the power of prayer, and the power of Him that hears prayer, who kills and makes alive. Though we cannot work miracles for the relief of the afflicted, we may afford much assistance to them. The good woman, hereupon, cried out, Now I know that thou art a man of God. Though she knew it before, by the increase of her meal, yet upon the death of her child she began to doubt it; but now she was abundantly satisfied that he had both the power and goodness of a man of God, and will never doubt it again, but will give up herself to the direction of his word, and the worshipping of the God of Israel. Thus the death of the child, like that of Lazarus, John 11. 4, was for the glory of God, and the honour of his prophet.

When Jesus comes to communicate his blessings, the convinced, trembling sinner often mistakes the meaning of the humbling lessons he teaches, and is ready to suspect that He means to bring his sins to remembrance, and to slay all his hopes. But He pities and bears with them, and when he hath forgiven their sins, and revived their hopes, they admire his love and power. They know assuredly that his word is truth, and expect every future good in reliance on his promise, and obedience to his holy will.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Ver. 1—16. *Elijah sends Ahab, king of Israel, notice of his coming.*

The severest judgments, of themselves, will not humble or change the hearts of sinners. They often grow more hardened, even to desperation. The sinner under the anguish of his sufferings, will continually increase in wickedness, and accumulate wrath to all eternity; for nothing except the atoning blood of Christ can expiate the guilt; nothing except the sanctifying Spirit of God can purge away the pollution of sin. All other expedients are delusions to keep men from this one Fountain, which God hath opened for sin and for uncleanness.

In these verses we find the sad state of Israel at this time. Jezebel being an idolater was a persecutor, and made Ahab one; but even in those bad times, there were some good people who feared God and served him, and some good prophets who instructed them. The priests and the levites were gone to Judah and Jerusalem, 2 Chron. 11. 13, 14, but instead of them, God raised up prophets, who read and expounded the law in private, in the families that retained their integrity, for we read not of any synagogues at this time. They were probably brought from the schools of the prophets, first instituted by Samuel, which still remained, and were very serviceable. They had not the spirit of prophecy as Elijah, but taught people to keep close to the God of Israel. These Jezebel aimed to extirpate. The few that escaped death were forced to hide themselves in caves, where they were cut off, though not from life, yet from usefulness, which is the end and comfort of life. When the prophets were persecuted, no doubt the few good people that were in the land, were treated in like manner.

Yet there was one very good man, who was a great man, Obadiah, who answers his name, "a servant of the Lord," one who feared God, and was faithful to him, and yet was a steward of the household to Ahab. He feared the Lord greatly. The fear of the Lord is frequently put to express the whole of true godliness. He was not only a good man, but zealously and eminently good; his place gave him great opportunities of doing good, and he feared the Lord from his youth; he began betimes to be religious, and had continued long. Early piety, it is to be

hoped, will be eminent piety. But it is strange to find such a good man governor of Ahab's house, an office of great honour, power, and trust. Certainly he was a man of honesty, industry, and ingenuity. Joseph and Daniel were preferred, because there were none so fit as they for the places they were preferred to. Those who profess religion, should study to recommend themselves to the esteem even of those that are without, by integrity, fidelity, and application to business. It was strange that so good a man as Obadiah would accept preferment in a court addicted to idolatry, and all manner of wickedness. We may be sure it was not made necessary that he should be of the king's religion. It was strange that either he did not reform Ahab, or Ahab corrupt him; but they were both fixed; he that was filthy, would be filthy still, and he that was holy, would be holy still. Those who fear God greatly, will keep up the fear of him in bad times and places; thus Obadiah did. God has his remnant among all sorts, high and low. The Lord has had a remnant in all places, where any part of his word has been known, in every age; and that faith, fear, and love of his name, which are the fruits of the Holy Spirit, will be accepted through the Redeemer. This great good man used his power to protect God's prophets. He did not think it enough to fear God himself, but, having wealth and power, he thought himself obliged to assist others that feared God; nor did he think his being kind to them would excuse him from being good himself. See how wonderfully God raises up friends for his ministers and people, for their shelter in difficult times. Bread and water were now scarce, yet Obadiah will find enough of both for God's prophets, to keep them alive for service hereafter.

Providence ordered it so, that Ahab might, with his own eyes, see how bad the consequences of this judgment were. Ahab's care was not to lose all the beasts; but he took no care about his soul, not to lose that. He took a deal of pains to seek grass, but none to seek the favour of God; fencing against the effect, but not inquiring how to remove the cause. The land of Judah was close to Israel, yet we find no complaint there of the want of rain. Judah yet obeyed God, and was faithful to the saints and prophets, Hos. 11. 12. By this distinction Israel might plainly

have seen the ground of God's controversy, Amos 4. 7, 8; but they blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, and would not see.

God at length ordered Elijah to present himself to Ahab, because the time was come when he would send rain upon the land. Above two years he had been hid with the widow at Zarephath, after he had been concealed one year by the brook Cherith; so that the third year of his sojourning there was the fourth of the famine, which lasted in all three years and six months, Luke 4. 25; James 5. 17. It bodes well to a people, when God calls his ministers to stand forth, and show themselves; a sign that he will give rain on the earth. And we may the better endure the bread of affliction, while our eyes see our teachers, Isa. 30. 20, 21.

Elijah first discovered himself to Obadiah. He knew, by the Spirit, where to meet him, and we are here told what passed between them. Obadiah saluted him with great respect; by this he made it appear that he indeed feared God greatly. Obadiah tells Elijah what great search Ahab had made for him. He takes it for granted, that Elijah would again withdraw: see 2 Kings 2. 16. He is sure Ahab would be so enraged at the disappointment, that he would put him to death. Tyrants and persecutors, in their passion, are often unreasonably outrageous, even toward their friends and confidants. He pleads that he did not deserve to be thus exposed, and put in peril of his life. Was it not told my lord how I hid the prophets? He mentions this, not in ostentation, but as evidence of his sincerity. He that had protected so many prophets hoped he should not have his own life hazarded by so great a prophet. Elijah assures him he would that very day present himself to Ahab. Let Obadiah know that Elijah spake seriously, and he will make no scruple to carry the message to Ahab. It was great surprise to Ahab, that Elijah, whom he so long sought, and had not found, was now found without seeking. He went in quest of grass, and finds him, from whose word, at God's mouth, he must expect rain. Yet his guilty conscience gives him reason to fear some dreadful judgment.

1. The form of expression here used, both in hebrew and latin, means after the third year, some time between the third and fourth year.—*Greenfield.*

5. During an eastern summer, even under its usual circumstances, the country is entirely dried up. As the hot season advances, vegetation entirely disappears, every green herb is parched from the roots, unless where it is watered by streams or the labour of man. The fields lately clothed with verdure become a brown and arid wilderness. The fountains fail, and the rivulets are dried up. If such is the common state of the country, we may easily suppose how exceedingly severe would be the effects of a third year's drought.

Ver. 17—20. *Elijah meets Ahab.*

Ahab accosts Elijah, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? One may guess how people stand affected to God by observing how they stand affected to his people and ministers. Elijah now came to bring blessings to Israel, tidings of the return of the rain; yet he is thus affronted. It has been the lot of the best and most useful men, to be called and counted the troublers of the land, and as public grievances. Christ and his apostles were thus misrepresented, Acts 17. 6.

Elijah boldly returned the charge upon the king, and proved that he was the troubler of Israel. Those who procure God's judgments, do the mischief, not he that foretells them only, and warns of them, that the nation may repent, and prevent them. As one having authority from the King of kings, Elijah ordered a convention to be summoned to mount Carmel, where an altar had been built to God; there, formerly, the pure worship of God had been kept up as well as it could be any where but at Jerusalem. Thither all Israel must come, and the prophets of Baal, who were dispersed all the country over, and those of the groves who were Jezebel's chaplains, must appear. Ahab convenes this assembly. Those that slighted and hated the counsels of Elijah, would be glad of his prayers.

19. Mount Carmel is a range of hills, about six or eight miles in length, on the shore of the Mediterranean sea, ending in the promontory which forms the bay of Acre. Its greatest height does not exceed 1500 feet. There was an altar on mount Carmel in the time of the romans; it was highly respected, but was then used for heathen rites. The word here translated "groves" is thought to mean the idol Ashtoreth, or Astarte, the syrian Venus.

Ver. 21—40. *Elijah's trial of the false prophets at mount Carmel.*

Three years and a half's famine would not bring Israel back to God; Elijah endeavoured to convince their judgments, and put the controversy between God and Baal upon a public trial: thus God would have every mouth stopped, and all flesh

to become silent before him. Elijah reproved the people for mixing the worship of God and the worship of Baal together. Many of the people wavered in their judgment, and varied in their practice. Elijah, therefore, called upon them to determine which of the two was the self-existent, supreme, and eternal God, the Creator, Governor, and Judge of the world, and to follow him alone. In reconcilable differences, says bishop Hall, nothing is more safe than indifferency both of practice and opinion; but in cases of such necessary hostility as betwixt God and Baal, he that is not with God, is against him. Compare Mark 9. 38, 39, with Matt. 12. 30. It is dangerous to halt between the service of God and the service of sin, the dominion of Christ and the dominion of our lusts. Those do so who are unresolved under their convictions; unstable and unsteady in their purposes; inconsistent, indifferent, and lukewarm in that which is good. Their heart is divided, Hos. 10. 2, whereas God will have all or none. It is of infinite importance that we come to a decision respecting the object of our worship, the source of our sufficiency for every good work. But, unless equally decided in our practice, our faith will be only a dead faith, however correct it may be. If Jesus be the only Saviour, let us cleave to him alone for every thing; if the bible be the word of God, let us reverence and receive the whole of it, and submit our understanding to the Divine teaching it contains. The people could say nothing to justify themselves, and they would say nothing to condemn themselves.

Elijah proposed to bring the matter to a trial; and Baal had all the outward advantages. Elijah, doubtless, had a special commission from God. The case was extraordinary, and the decision would be of use, not only then, but in all ages. It showed the courage of Elijah, that he, lately a poor, starving exile, durst stand alone in the cause of God against such powers and numbers; and the issue encourages all God's witnesses and advocates never to fear the face of man. The God that answers by fire, let him be God; because the atonement was to be made by sacrifice, before the judgment could be removed in mercy. The God therefore that has power to pardon sin, and to signify it by consuming the sin-offering, must needs be the God that can relieve

us against the calamity. He that can give fire, can give rain: see Matt. 9. 2, 6. The people allow the proposal to be unexceptionable. They that were firm for God, doubted not but it would end to his honour; they that were indifferent, were willing to be determined. Ahab and the prophets of Baal durst not oppose for fear of the people, and hoped that either they could obtain fire from heaven, (though they never had yet,) and the rather, because, as some think, they worshipped the sun in Baal; or, that Elijah could not. If, in this trial, they could but avoid a decision against themselves, their other advantages would give them the victory.

The prophets of Baal tried first, but in vain, with their god. Elijah gave them the lead for their greater confusion; only, knowing that the working of Satan is with lying wonders, he took care to prevent them from committing any fraud. How senseless, how brutish were they in their addresses to Baal! Like fools, they leaped up and down, or danced about the altar. Like madmen, they cut themselves with knives and lancets. God never required his worshippers thus to honour him; but the service of the devil, though, in some instances, it pleases and pampers the body, yet, in other things, really is cruel to it, as in envy and drunkenness. This was the manner of the worshippers of Baal. God expressly forbade his worshippers to cut themselves, Deut. 14. 1. He requires that we mortify our lusts and corruptions; but corporeal penances and severities, such as the papists use, which have no tendency to that, are no pleasure to him—Who has required these things at your hands?

Elijah stood by, and patiently heard them for many hours, praying to an idol, yet with secret indignation and disdain. At noon, when the sun was at the hottest, he upbraided them with their folly; and notwithstanding the gravity of his office, and the seriousness of the work he had before him, banters them. The absurdities of superstition and false religion might excite our ridicule, did not their awful effects demand our tears. The worship of idols is most ridiculous, and it is just to expose it to scorn. This will by no means justify those who ridicule the worshippers of God in Christ, because the worship is not performed just in their way. Baal's prophets became the more violent, and acted more ridiculously. Elijah let

them go on, till they quite despaired of success, which was not till the time of the evening sacrifice. During all that time there was no answer, nor any that regarded. Idols could do neither good nor evil; yet Satan could have sent fire, but he can do nothing except the Lord permit him.

Elijah soon obtained from Jehovah an answer by fire. Finding the ruins of an altar there, which had formerly been used in the service of the Lord, he chose to repair that; intimating that he was not about to introduce any new religion, but to revive the faith and worship of their fathers' God, and reduce them to their first love, their first works. He repaired this altar with twelve stones, according to the number of the twelve tribes. Though ten of the tribes were revolted to Baal, he looks upon them as still belonging to God, by the ancient covenant with their fathers. In the worship of the God of Israel they had communion with each other, and the twelve were one. The reference to the name of Israel, given to Jacob, was suited to shame their idol worship, and to encourage his own heart in prayer. Having built his altar in the name of the Lord, he prepared his sacrifice. If we, in sincerity, offer our hearts to God, he will, by his grace, kindle a holy fire in them. Elijah was no priest, nor were his attendants levites. Carmel had neither tabernacle nor temple; it was a great way distant from the ark of the testimony, and the place God had chosen; this was not the altar that sanctified the gift, yet never was any sacrifice more acceptable to God than this. The particular levitical institutions were so often dispensed with in the time of the judges, Samuel's time, and now, that one would be inclined to think they were more designed for types to be fulfilled in the evangelical anti-types, than for laws to be fulfilled in the strict observance of them. Their perishing thus in the using, as the apostle speaks, Col. 2. 22, intimated their utter abolition, after a while, Heb. 8. 13.

Elijah ordered abundance of water to be poured upon his altar, and his sacrifice! to prevent the suspicion of any fire under, and to make the expected miracle the more illustrious. He then solemnly addressed himself to God by prayer. His prayer is not long, for he used no vain repetitions, nor thought he should be

heard for his much speaking; but it is very grave and composed, and shows his mind to be calm and sedate, far from the heats and disorders Baal's prophets were in. A few words uttered in assured faith, and with fervent affection for the glory of God, and love to the souls of men, or thirstings after the Lord's image and favour, often form "the effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous man, which avail-eth much." Though not at the place appointed, he chose the appointed time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, thereby to testify his communion with the altar at Jerusalem. Though he expected an answer by fire, yet he came near to the altar with boldness, and feared not that fire. He addressed himself to God, as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, acting faith on God's ancient covenant, and reminding the people of their relation both to God and to the patriarchs. He pleads the glory of God. Elijah sought not his own glory, but in subservience to God, for his own necessary vindication, and for the edification of the people.

God immediately answered by fire: the fire of the Lord fell, and not only, as Lev. 9. 24; 1 Chron. 21. 26; 2 Chron. 7. 1, consumed the sacrifice and the wood, in token of God's acceptance of the offering, but licked up all the water in the trench. Those who fall as victims to the fire of God's wrath, no water can shelter, any more than briars or thorns, Isa. 27. 4, 5. But this was not all; the fire consumed the stones of the altar, and the very dust, to show that it was no ordinary fire. We may well imagine what terror the fire struck on guilty Ahab, and the worshippers of Baal. And now the people are all agreed, convinced, and satisfied—Jehovah, he is the God. Some, we hope, had their hearts turned, but the generality of them were convinced only, not converted; yielded to the truth of God, that he is the God, but consented not to his covenant, that he should be theirs. Blessed are they that have not seen what they saw, yet have believed, and have been wrought upon by it, more than they that saw it. Let it for ever be looked upon as a point adjudged, that Jehovah, he is God, God alone.

The prophets of Baal, as criminals, are seized, condemned, and executed; by the express law of God they were to be put to death, Deut. 13. 1—11. There needed

no proof of the fact; all Israel witnessed it, therefore Elijah, acting still by an extraordinary commission, which is not to be drawn into a precedent, ordered them all to be slain immediately, as the troublers of the land, and Ahab himself dares not oppose it. Under the christian dispensation, we must not destroy men's lives, though they have deceived others to idolatrous worship, but we must exercise severity in crucifying our own lusts.

This contest was for life. Had they succeeded, and Elijah failed, his head had been forfeited. Both the man and the act were extraordinary. Far be it from us to accuse God's commands or executions of cruelty. The prophet only moves the performance of that law which Israel could not have omitted without sin.—(34.)

Ver. 41—46. *Elijah, by prayer, obtaineth rain.*

Israel, being thus far reformed, that they had acknowledged the Lord to be God, and had consented to the execution of Baal's prophets, was so far accepted, that God poured out blessings upon his land. Elijah sends Ahab to eat and drink. He himself retires to pray, for though God has promised rain, he must ask it, Zech. 10. 1. He cast himself down on his knees, in token of humility, reverence, and importunity; and put his face between his knees, that is, bowed his head so low, that it touched his knees, thus abasing himself in the sense of his own meanness, now God had thus honoured him. He ordered his servant to bring him notice, as soon as he discerned a cloud arising out of the Mediterranean sea, of which he had a large prospect from the top of Carmel. The sailors at this day call it cape Carmel. Six times his servant goes and sees nothing, yet Elijah continues praying. Though the answer of our fervent and believing supplications does not come quickly, we must continue instant in prayer, and not faint or give over; for at the end, it shall speak and not lie.

A little cloud at length appears, which soon overspreads the heavens, and waters the earth. Great blessings often arise from small beginnings, showers of plenty from a cloud of a span long. Let us never despise the day of small things, but hope and wait for great things from it. This was not as a morning cloud, which passes away, though Israel's goodness was so, but one that produced a

plentiful rain, Psa. 68. 9, and an earnest of more. From what small beginnings have greater matters arisen! It is no otherwise in all the gracious proceedings of God with the soul. Scarcely perceptible are the first works of his Spirit in the heart, which grow up at last to the wonder of men, and applause of angels.

Elijah, hereupon, hastened Ahab home, and himself attended him. God will strengthen his people for every service to which his commandments and providence shall call them. The awful displays of Divine justice and holiness will dismay the sinner's heart, will convince, extort confessions, and dispose to outward obedience while the impression lasts; but the view of these, in union with mercy, love, and truth in Christ Jesus, is needful to draw the soul to self-abasement, trust, and love. Yet the Holy Spirit employs both these in the conversion of sinners as he pleases. When sinners are impressed with Divine truths, they should be earnestly exhorted to set about those duties to which the Saviour calls his disciples.

And do we hesitate—still halt between two opinions? Does the sick man hesitate whether to accept of health? Does the poor man hesitate when relief is offered? Do we stop to inquire whether health and life ought to be preserved? If not, why halt between two opinions in the infinitely greater concern of eternal life and salvation? It must be a proof that we are not convinced of its necessity or its advantage. Yet such is the reality, the pleasure, the advantage of the religion of Christ, that it deserves and demands our whole hearts. Now then let the *awful* decision be made! And shall it not be a settled point that religion, serious religion, vital religion shall be our first business, and that every thing which opposes it shall give place?—(7.)

CHAPTER XIX.

Ver. 1—8. *Elijah, threatened by Jezebel, flees to the wilderness.*

No miracles or judgments will stop the fury of persecutors; but mad passions often defeat their own ends, and furious threats prevent the execution of malice. Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, not to convince, but to exasperate her. It is not said he told her what God had done, but what Elijah had done; as

if he had brought fire from heaven, and the hand of the Lord had not been in it; and he aggravated the slaying of the prophets of Baal as Elijah's crime, without taking notice that it was a just reprisal for killing God's prophets.

Jezebel sent Elijah a threatening message. Carnal hearts are hardened and enraged against God, by that which should convince and conquer them, and bring them into subjection to him. But how came she to send him word of her design? Perhaps, although she desired his blood, yet, at this time, she durst not attempt to hurt him, the people all counting him to be a prophet. Elijah, hereupon, fled for his life, that very night, as it seems, after the sacrifice. Great faith is not always alike strong. He might be serviceable to Israel at this juncture, and had all reason to depend upon God's protection, while doing God's work; yet he flees! He was, it seems, left to himself for his humiliation. Instead of leading the people to destroy the worship of Baal, and restore that of Jehovah, he fled from his work, impatiently wished and prayed for death. Such changes, many believers, who have strong passions, and are placed in difficult circumstances, often experience.

From Beersheba Elijah went forward into that vast wilderness in which the israelites wandered. Being wearied with his journey, he requested for his life, so it is in the margin, that he might die; death is life to a good man; the death of the body is the life of the soul. Yet his was not the deliberate desire of grace, as Paul's, to depart and be with Christ, but the passionate wish of his corruption, as Job's. He pleads, It is enough, I have done enough, and suffered enough; I am weary of living. Those that have secured such a happiness in the other world, will soon have enough of this world. God thus left Elijah to himself, to show that when he was bold and strong, it was in the Lord, and the power of his might; but of himself he was no better than his fathers, or brethren.

God, by an angel, fed Elijah in that wilderness, in the wants and perils of which, if God had not graciously succoured him, he had perished. God needed him not, yet designed further to honour him, and sent an angel to keep him alive. Our case would be bad sometimes, if God should take us at our word, and grant us our foolish, passionate re-

quests. Elijah need not complain of the unkindnesses of men, when it was thus made up by the ministration of angels. Wherever God's children are, they are upon their Father's ground; they are still under their Father's eye and care. They may lose themselves in a wilderness, but God has not left them; there they may look up to Him that lives and sees them, as Hagar, Gen. 16. 13. He is carried, in the strength of this meat, to Horeb, the mount of God. Thither the Spirit of the Lord led him, that he might have communion with God in the same place as Moses. The angel bade Elijah eat the second time, because of the greatness of the journey that was before him. God knows what he designs us for, though we do not—what services, what trials, and will take care for us that we are furnished with grace sufficient. See how many ways God took to keep Elijah alive; fed him by ravens, with multiplied meals—then by an angel—and now, to show that man lives not by bread alone, he kept him alive forty days without meat, continually traversing the mazes of the desert, a day for a year of Israel's wanderings; yet he neither needs food, nor desires it. The place, no doubt, reminded him of the manna, and encouraged him to hope that God would sustain him here, and, in due time, bring him hence, as he did Israel, though, like them, fretful and distrustful.

Ver. 9—13. *God manifests himself to Elijah.*

Elijah was guided to mount Horeb rather than to any other place; probably he sought retirement for meditation and prayer. Yet this was not his proper work; he ought not to have fled from the land of Israel, but to have stayed there, and to have persevered in promoting the revival of true religion. The word of the Lord came to him. We cannot go any where to be out of the reach of God's eye, his arm, and his word. Whither can I go from thy Spirit? Psa. 139. 7. God will take care of his outcasts; and those who, for his sake, are driven out from among men, he will find, and own, and gather with everlasting loving-kindnesses.

The question God puts to him, What doest thou here, Elijah? is a reproof. It concerns us often to inquire whether we are in our place, and in the way of our duty. Am I where I should be? whither God calls me, where my business lies,

and where I may be useful? He excused his retreat, and desired it might not be imputed to want of zeal for reformation, but to despair of success. He complained of the people, their obstinacy in sin, and the height of impiety they were got to. Those are truly miserable, that have the testimony and prayers of God's prophets against them. He charged them with having forsaken God's covenant. Those who neglect God's ordinances, and their communion with him, really forsake his covenant, and break their league with him. He charged them with having thrown down his altars; they not only deserted them, and suffered them to go to decay, but, in zeal for the worship of Baal, had wilfully demolished them. But this was not all; They have slain thy prophets with the sword, those who, it seems, ministered at those altars. He gives the reason why he retired into this desert; I only am left. Despair of success hinders many a good enterprise. None are willing to venture alone; forgetting that those are not alone who have God with them.

Did Elijah come hither to meet with God? He shall find that God will not fail to meet him. The wind, and earthquake, and fire did not make him cover his face, but the still voice did. Gracious souls are more affected by the tender mercies of the Lord, than by his terrors. He stood at the entrance of the cave, ready to hear what God had to say to him. In the manifestation of God to Elijah, there seems a designed reference to that with which Moses was favoured, when the Lord caused his goodness to pass before him, *Exod. 34. 1—8.* When God would show Moses his glory, he proclaimed his goodness; and so here, He was in the word, he was in the still small voice. The law was thus given to Israel, with the appearances of terror first, and then with a voice of words; and Elijah, being now called to revive that law, especially the two first commandments, must not only awaken and terrify the people with amazing signs, like the earthquake and fire, but must endeavour, with a still small voice, to convince and persuade them, and not forsake them, when he should do that. Faith comes by hearing the word of God; miracles do but make way for it. Then God spake to his people with terror; but in the gospel of Christ, which was to be introduced by the spirit and power of Elias,

he would speak by a still small voice, the dread of which should not make us afraid: see *Heb. 12. 18.*

The word of God is indeed like a fire, and the hammer that breaketh the rocks in pieces; the whole of it should be preached with vehemence and earnestness; but the ministry of condemnation and the terrors of vengeance, make way for the ministry of righteousness and the gospel of Christ, attended by earnest persuasions, expostulations, and invitations, in which the Lord comes to seal our hearts to himself. In the first ages of christianity, miracles called men's attention to the preached gospel, which was the power of God to salvation to many tens of thousands; and, though preaching the strict and holy law, with its awful condemnations, be the appointed means of awakening the sinner's conscience to a sense of guilt and wrath, yet the mild voice of Him who speaks from the cross, or the mercy-seat, is accompanied with peculiar power in taking possession of the heart.

This transaction is of the greatest importance. It evinces the intimate analogy between the mosaical and christian dispensations, as explained by our Lord and his apostles. And that it was the same Divine Person who appeared in glory to Moses and Elijah at Horeb, and with them to his chosen apostles, declared by a voice from heaven to be the Son of God.—*Hales.*

Ver. 14—18. *God's answer to Elijah, and his mission to anoint Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha.*

God repeated the question, What doest thou here? When Elijah wished he might die, God answered him not according to his folly. But when he complained of his discouragement—and whither should God's prophets go with their complaints of that kind, but to their Master?—God gave him an answer. He sends him with directions to anoint Hazael, king of Syria, Jehu king of Israel, and Elisha his successor in the prophetic office. The unction denoted special designation from God to their offices, and the qualifications they would be endowed with for their work. Christ united in himself the offices of prophet, priest, and king, the only persons ordered to be anointed in the scripture.

Elijah had complained that the wickedness of Israel was unpunished. Here is an answer. 1. When Hazael comes to be king of Syria, he shall correct the people for their idolatry; see *2 Kings 8. 12.* 2. When Jehu comes to be king of

Israel, he shall utterly destroy the house of Ahab, that set up and maintained idolatry. 3. Elisha, while thou art on earth, shall strengthen thy hands; and when thou art gone, shall carry on thy work, and witness against the apostasy of Israel. Elisha, with the sword of the Spirit, shall terrify and wound the consciences of those who escape Hazael's sword of war, and Jehu's sword of justice; With the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked, Isa. 11. 4; 2 Thess. 2. 8; Hos. 6. 5. It is a great comfort to good men, and to good ministers, to think that God will never want instruments to do his work, in his time; and that when they are gone, others shall be raised up to carry it on.

God gives comforting information of the number of israelites who retained their integrity, though he thought he was left alone. In times of the greatest degeneracy and apostasy, God has always had, and will have some faithful to him, that keep their integrity. The apostle mentions this answer of God to Elijah, Rom. 11. 4, and applies it to his own day, when the jews generally rejected the gospel. It is God's work to preserve that remnant, and distinguish them from the rest, for without his grace they could not have distinguished themselves: it is a remnant according to the election of grace. It is but a little remnant, in comparison with the degenerate race; what is seven thousand to the thousands of Israel? God's faithful ones often are his hidden ones, Psa. 83. 3, and the visible church is scarcely visible. The wheat is lost in chaff, and the gold in dross, till the sifting, refining, separating day comes. The Lord knows them that are his, though we do not; he sees in secret.

God pleases himself in hidden treasures. It is enough that his own eyes behold his riches. The sight of his faithful ones sometimes hath been lost, but never the being. The foundation is sure, God knoweth who are his.—(34.)

These he reserves to himself, and preserves from prevailing abominations. For their conversion and edification he waits and provides, while impenitent sinners ripen for vengeance, and he raises up instruments to execute it upon them. There are more good people in the world, than some wise and holy men think there are. Their jealousy of themselves, and for God, makes them think that corruption

is universal; but God sees not as they do. When we come to heaven we shall miss many whom we thought to have met there; we shall meet many whom we little thought to have met there. God's love often proves larger than man's charity, and far more extensive.

Ver. 19—21. *The call of Elisha.*

Elijah found Elisha by Divine direction, not in the schools of the prophets, but in the field; not reading, or praying, or sacrificing, but ploughing. Though master of the ground, and oxen, and servants, yet he himself laid his hand to the plough. Idleness is no man's honour, nor is husbandry any man's disgrace. An honest calling in the world does not put us out of the way of our heavenly calling; any more than it did Elisha, who was taken from following the plough, to feed Israel, and to sow the seed of the word; as the apostles from fishing to catch men. Elisha inquired not after Elijah, but was anticipated with this call. We love God, and choose him, because he chose us, and loved us first.

It was a powerful call; Elijah cast his mantle upon him in token of friendship. His heart was touched by the Holy Spirit, and he was ready to leave all to attend Elijah. It is in a day of power, that Christ's subjects are made willing, Psa. 110. 3, nor would any come to Christ, unless they were thus drawn. Elisha came to a resolution at once, but begged a little time to take leave of his parents. This was not an excuse for delay, Luke 9. 61, but only a reservation of the respect and duty he owed to his father and mother. Elijah would not hinder him; nay, he might go back, and not return, if he pleased. He will not force him, nor take him against his will. Let him sit down and count the cost, and make it his own act. The efficacy of God's grace preserves the liberty of man's will, so that those who are good, are good of choice, and not by constraint. That it was a pleasant and acceptable call to Elisha, appears by the farewell-feast he made. Yet he not only quitted all the comforts of his father's house, but exposed himself to the malignity of Jezebel, and her party. It was a discouraging time for prophets to set out in. A man that had consulted with flesh and blood, would not be fond of Elijah's mantle; yet Elisha cheerfully leaves all to accompany him. The prophet now could no longer

complain that he was left alone, God had provided him with a companion. It was an effectual call: Elijah left Elisha to his own choice, and he soon arose, went after him, and not only associated with him, but ministered to him, as his servant, 2 Kings 3. 11. It is of great advantage to young ministers, to spend some time under the direction of those that are aged and experienced, whose years teach wisdom; and, if occasion be, to minister to them. Those that would be fit to teach, must have time to learn.

God will give his servants the proper qualifications and dispositions for the place in which he designs to fix them. We cannot but adore his secret and invincible influence upon the soul. When the Saviour said to one and to another, Follow me, the dearest friends and most lucrative occupations were cheerfully renounced, and the most arduous duties performed from love to his name. May we in like manner feel the energy of his grace working in us mightily, and by immediate and unreserved submission may we make our calling and election sure.—(60.)

If we do not enter into the works of our heavenly Master with desire and cheerfulness, as Elisha did, they are not likely to prosper in our hands. He is not worthy of his spiritual station who holds not the service of God to be the highest, the richest preferment.—(34.)

CHAPTER XX.

Ver. 1—11. *Benhadad besieges Samaria.*

The indignation of the Lord will weaken and dispirit sinners. Those nations in particular that have been favoured with the light of revelation, will be brought low for iniquity. David had subdued the Syrians, and made them tributaries to Israel, but Israel's apostasy from God makes them formidable again. The late famine had much diminished the Israelites, and by the righteous judgments of God, the remainder were so dismayed that they retired or fled, and left Samaria in a very defenceless state.

Benhadad sent Ahab a very insolent demand. Ahab sent a very disgraceful submission; sin brings men into such straits, by putting them out of Divine protection. If God do not rule us, our enemies shall; a rebel to God is a slave to all besides. Guilt dispirits men, and makes them cowards; Ahab knew Baal

could not help, and had no reason to think that God would, and therefore is content to buy his life upon any terms. Benhadad, upon his submission, became yet more insolent. He will send his servants, not even come himself; Whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall take that away. We are often crossed in what we most dote upon; and that proves least safe, which is most dear.

Ahab became desperate, and will rather hazard his life than give up all thus. Men will part with their most pleasant things, those they most love, to save their lives, yet they lose their souls rather than part with any pleasure or interest to prevent it. Benhadad imprecated the impotent revenge of his gods. His pride is confident, his malice is cruel; this prepares for ruin. Ahab sent a rebuke to his assurance, Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off. This was one of the wisest sayings that ever Ahab spake, and is a good memento to all. It is folly to boast before, of any day, since we know not what it may bring forth, Prov. 27. 1. It is impolitic to despise an enemy; and to be too sure of victory, is the way to be beaten. Apply it to our spiritual conflicts; Peter fell by his confidence: while we are here, we are but girding on the harness, therefore must never boast as though we had put it off. Happy is the man that feareth always, and is never off his watch.

1. The kings here spoken of were governors of small districts or tribes.

Ver. 12—21. *Benhadad's defeat.*

Drunkenness is a sin, to which armies and their officers have, of old, been addicted. Benhadad's drunkenness was the forerunner of his fall, as Belshazzar's, Dan. 5. 4. The Israelites had directions from an inspired prophet: Ahab, in his prosperity, would not have borne the sight of a prophet, but now he bids him welcome, when none of the prophets of the groves could give him any assistance. He inquired not for a prophet of the Lord, but God sent one to him unasked; he waits to be gracious. This prophet, who is not named, tells Ahab from God, that this very day the siege should be raised, and the army of the Syrians routed. He is reminded of the use to be made of this turn of affairs; Thou shalt know that I am Jehovah, the sovereign Lord of all. The prophet instructed him what to do for the gaining of this victory. The

persons employed must be the servants of the chief men of Israel then at Samaria, and the most unlikely men that could be thought of, for such a bold attempt; yet these must do it; weak and foolish things must be instruments of confounding the wise and strong. While Benhadad's boasting is punished, Ahab's must be prevented and precluded. Ahab must himself so testify his confidence in the word of God, as to command in person, though, in the eye of reason, he exposed himself to the utmost danger by it; but it is fit that those who have the benefit of God's promises, should enter upon them. Yet he is allowed to make use of what forces he had at hand, to follow the blow. All he had within call were but seven thousand men. The proud syrians were beaten, and the despised israelites were conquerors. The orders of the proud, intoxicated king only embarrassed his troops, and prevented them from attacking the israelites with spirit, lest they should slay those whom they had been ordered to take alive. Those that are most secure, are commonly least courageous. Ahab slew the syrians with a great slaughter. God oftentimes makes one wicked man a scourge to another.

Ver. 22—30. *The syrians again defeated.*

We have here another success of Ahab, by Divine aid, against the syrians. God has wise and holy ends in suffering wicked men to prosper, and thus he glorifies his own name. Ahab is admonished by a prophet to prepare for another war. It should seem, he was now secure; but the prophet bade him strengthen himself, and be ready. God had decreed the end, but Ahab must use the means, else he tempts God. It concerns us always to expect assaults from our spiritual enemies, and therefore to mark and see what we do. Those about Benhadad advised him to change his ground. They take it for granted that it was not Israel, but Israel's gods, that beat them; but they speak very ignorantly of Jehovah—they supposed that Israel had many deities, to whom they ascribed limited power within a certain district. Jehovah had displayed his glory from mount Zion, and Samaria was situated on a hill; they concluded that the God of Israel was powerful on mountains, not on the plains. Thus vain were the gentiles in their imaginations concerning God; so wretchedly were their foolish hearts darkened, and,

professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. In the pride and enmity of his heart, fallen man conceives of God as if he were such a one as himself. They advise him to change his officers, to employ captains, who were commanders by merit, and were inured to war. The greatest wisdom in worldly concerns is often united with the most contemptible folly in the things of God.

The disproportion of numbers was very remarkable. A man of God is sent to Ahab, to tell him that this numerous army should all be delivered into his hand; not for his sake, but because the syrians had blasphemed God, therefore God will do it to preserve the honour of his own name. When they go upon a presumption so very injurious to the Divine omnipotence, and to the honour of Him who is Lord of all hosts, not only in hills and valleys, but in heaven and earth, which they are willingly ignorant of, they shall be undeceived, at the expense of the vast army so much their pride and confidence. They engaged, and the syrians were totally routed: many of them that thought themselves safe under the walls of Aphek, a fortified city, found their bane where they hoped for protection; the wall fell upon them. The falling of this wall, and the slaughter made by it, must be ascribed to miraculous interposition. Benhadad hid himself in a chamber within a chamber. The greatest confidence often ends in the greatest cowardice.

Ver. 31—43. *Ahab makes peace with Benhadad, and liberates him, for which he is reprov- ed.*

As governments then were, that of Israel was one of the most easy and gentle, and not cruel to their enemies, when they lay at their mercy. "They are merciful kings, therefore we may hope to find mercy, upon our submission." This encouragement poor sinners have to repent and humble themselves before God; Have we not heard, that the God of Israel is a merciful God? Have we not found him so? Let us therefore rend our hearts, and return to him, Joel 2. 13. That is evangelical repentance, which flows from an apprehension of the mercy of God, in Christ; there is forgiveness with him. Benhadad's servants represent to Ahab their master, 1. As a penitent.—Many take upon them to repent of their wrongdoing, when it does not succeed, who, if they had prospered in it, would have justified it, and gloried in it. 2. As a beggar

for his life. What a great change is here ! The most haughty in prosperity are commonly most abject in adversity ; an evil spirit will thus affect a man in both these conditions. See how God glorifies himself, when he looks on proud men, abases, and hides them in the dust together, Job 40. 11—13.

Observe Ahab's foolish acceptance of this submission, and the league he suddenly made. He was proud to be courted by him whom he feared, and inquires for him with great tenderness. He is my brother, brother king, though not brother israelite. Ahab valued himself more on his royalty, than on his religion, and others accordingly. This word, brother, they catch at, and were encouraged by that to fetch Benhadad to Ahab ; he that calls him brother, will let him live. Let poor penitents hear God, in his word, calling them children, Jer. 31. 20, catch at it, echo to it, and call him Father. Benhadad, upon his submission, shall be treated with as an ally. Ahab made a covenant with him, not consulting either God's prophets, or the elders of the land, concerning what was fit to be insisted on.

He made a league with Benhadad upon disadvantageous terms, and sent him away without any security for the performance of the treaty. The streets in Damascus probably were allotted to the israelites for the purposes of trade, that they might live in them unmolested. The same liberty had been granted the syrians in Samaria, where the idolaters were at ease when the prophets of Jehovah were cut off. He sent him away without reproving him for his blasphemous reflections on the God of Israel, for whose honour Ahab had no concern. There are those on whom success is ill-bestowed ; they know not how to serve either God or their generation, or even their own true interests with their prosperity : Let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness.

The reproof to Ahab was given by a prophet, in the name of the Lord ; the jews say it was Micaiah, ch. 22. 8. This prophet designed to reprove Ahab by a parable. He commanded one of his brother prophets to smite him, and this, in God's name ; and because he disobeyed an express command of God, which was so much the worse if he were himself a prophet, he was slain by a lion. This not only showed how provoking disobedience

is, Col. 3. 6, but intimated to Ahab, that if a good prophet were thus punished for sparing his friend and God's, when God said, Smite, of much sorer punishment should a wicked king be thought worthy, who spared his enemy and God's, when God said, Smite. We must be merciful as He is merciful, and not otherwise. The next prophet made no difficulty. Wounded as he was, and disguised, the prophet applied to the king in a story, whereby he charged himself with such a crime as the king was now guilty of in sparing Benhadad, and waits for the king's judgment upon it. The king says, Thou shouldest either not have undertaken the trust, or have been careful and faithful to it, there is no remedy ; so shall thy doom be, thyself hast decided it. Now the prophet puts off his disguise, and plainly tells Ahab, Thou art the man : thyself hast decided it ; out of thine own mouth art thou judged. Expect therefore that thy life shall go for his life, which thou hast spared. Ahab lost his life in fighting against this Benhadad, who did not fulfil this treaty, ch. 22. 35, and thy people for his people, whom likewise thou hast spared. See this fulfilled, 2 Kings 10. 32. We are told Ahab went to his house, heavy and displeased, not truly penitent, or seeking to undo what he had done amiss ; but enraged at the prophet, exasperated against God, yet vexed at himself, every way out of humour, notwithstanding his victory.

May we not here by accommodation hint some profitable instructions ? The convinced sinner, reduced to despair, hears of the mercy abounding in Christ Jesus, and prays "God be merciful to me a sinner," having no excuse to make, or plea to urge. Becoming acquainted with the precious promises contained in the scripture, he catches at them, and pleads them in humble prayer. But alas ! most that hear these glad tidings are busy here and there till the day of salvation is gone ! Even true believers often are so taken up with trifles, as to let seasons of important usefulness glide away unimproved, to the loss both of themselves and others. May the Lord teach us so to number our days, that we apply our hearts to wisdom !

38. Instead of *aphar*, dust or ashes, may be read *aphad*, a bandage. The difference is only in the corner of a letter, which might be mistaken by a transcriber. See *Carpenter*.

CHAPTER XXI.

Ver. 1—4. *Ahab covets Naboth's vineyard.*

As fallen creatures we hanker after the things which are withheld from us in God's providence; every addition of wealth or prosperity increases the violence of this propensity. Ahab coveted his neighbour's vineyard, which lay near his palace, and was convenient for a kitchen garden. Perhaps, Naboth had been pleased that he had a vineyard situated so advantageously, but the situation proved fatal to him; many a man's possessions have been his snare, and his neighbourhood to greatness, of pernicious consequence. Ahab set his eye and heart on this vineyard, and nothing will serve him but it must be his own. He had tamely quitted the great advantages God had given him, of enlarging his dominion, by his victory over the Syrians, and now is eager to enlarge his garden! To desire a convenience to his estate, was not evil; but to desire any thing inordinately, though we would compass it by lawful means, is selfishness, as if we must engross all the conveniences, and none live, or live comfortably, by us; this is contrary to the law of contentment, and the tenth commandment.

Canaan was, in a peculiar manner, God's land; and this was one of the conditions, that they should not alienate any part which fell to their lot, unless in case of extreme necessity, and then only till the year of jubilee, Lev. 25. 28. Naboth foresaw that if his vineyard were sold to the crown, it would never return to his heirs; he would gladly oblige the king, but he must obey God rather than men. Ahab did ill to ask that which his subject could not grant without sin. Naboth seems to have been a conscientious man, who would rather hazard the king's displeasure than offend God.

Ahab's proud spirit aggravated the indignity; he regarded not Naboth's conscientious reason for his refusal, but secretly meditated revenge; it cut him to the heart to be crossed in his desires. Discontent is a sin that is its own punishment, and makes men torment themselves. It is a sin that is its own parent; it arises not from the condition, but from the mind: as we find Paul contented in a prison, so Ahab discontented in a palace. He had all the delights of Canaan, that pleasant land, at command, the wealth

of a kingdom, the pleasures of a court, and the honours and powers of a throne; yet all avails him nothing without Naboth's vineyard! Inordinate desires expose men to continual vexations, and they that are disposed to fret, will, however well off, always find something or other to fret at.

Ver. 5—16. *Naboth murdered by Jezebel.*

Nothing but mischief was to be expected from Jezebel. Under pretence of comforting Ahab, she fed his pride and passion. She meant to rouse her husband to gratify both his covetousness and his revenge. According to the manner of arbitrary kings, she would have him seize the vineyard, and murder its possessor. When, instead of a help meet, a man has an agent for Satan in the form of an artful, unprincipled, yet beloved woman, fatal effects may be expected! Unhappy princes those are, and hurried apace toward their ruin, who have those about them who stir them up to acts of tyranny, and teach them how to abuse their power.

Never were more wicked orders given by any prince, than those Jezebel sent to the magistrates of Jezreel. She made use of the king's name, knowing the thing would please him when it was done, she commanded them to put Naboth to death, without giving them any reason. To oblige them to find the witnesses, sons of Belial, themselves to suborn, and then to give judgment upon a testimony they knew to be false, was such a defiance to every thing that is just and sacred, as we hope cannot be paralleled in history. She must look upon the elders of Jezreel as men perfectly lost to every thing honest and honourable, when she expected these orders should be obeyed, and put them in the way to do it.

It must be done under colour of religion. Signify to your city that you are apprehensive of some dreadful judgment coming upon you, take on you to be afraid that there is some great offender among you, for whose sake God is angry; charge the people, if they know of any such, to inform against him, and let Naboth be fixed upon as the suspected person. That may serve for a pretence to set him on high among the people. Let proclamation be made, and let the witnesses give evidence against him. There is no wickedness so vile, so horrid, but religion has sometimes been made a cover for it.

We must not think the worse of fasting and praying for their having been sometimes thus abused, but much the worse of the wicked designs that have at any time been carried on under their colour. It must be done under colour of justice also, and with the formalities of legal process. The crime laid to Naboth's charge, was blaspheming God and the king; a complicated blasphemy. She pretended not any ground at all for the charge; though witnesses must swear it, and Naboth must not be permitted to speak for himself, but immediately, under pretence of a universal detestation of the crime, they must carry him out and stone him. His blaspheming God would be the forfeiture of his life; he is also charged with treason, in blaspheming the king, for which his estate was to be confiscated, that Ahab might have his vineyard.

Never were wicked orders more wickedly obeyed. They stoned Naboth's sons also, that there might be none to avenge his death, or demand his estate, 2 Kings 9. 26. Let us from this sad story be amazed at the wickedness of the wicked, and the power of Satan in the children of disobedience. What a holy indignation may we be filled with, to see wickedness in the place of judgment! Eccl. 3. 16. Let us commit the keeping of our lives and comforts to God, for innocence will not always be our security, and let us rejoice in the belief of a judgment to come. Now there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked, Eccl. 8. 14, but all will be set to rights in the great day.

Let judges, juries, and witnesses, beware of being drawn aside by fear, affection, or interest; for those who now are placed upon the tribunal, shortly must stand at the bar, to answer before an impartial heart-searching Judge. How much more preferable to have suffered injustice with a good conscience, than to have been successful in iniquity!

Ahab might have taken possession by his officers, but he was so pleased, that he went to Jezreel himself; and it seems he went with some state, for Jehu remembers that he and Bidkar attended him at this time, 2 Kings 9. 25. They that connive at, rejoice in, or seek profit by the crimes of others, will be condemned equally with the actual perpetrators.

10, 13. The marginal reading is, "or bless."

Though Jezebel was herself an abominable idolatress, yet, as the law of Moses still continued in force, she seems to have been wicked enough to have destroyed Naboth upon the false accusation of blessing the heathen Aleim and Molech, which subjected him to death by Deut. 13. 6—10; 17. 2—7.—*Parkhurst*. Or, blessing is put for cursing and blaspheming, by the figure called euphemism.—*Poole*. In all languages there are words which admit of contrary meanings.

Ver. 17—29. *Elijah denounces judgments against Ahab.*

There was none like Ahab; he made himself a slave to his lusts, and was as much at their command, as any servant at his master's. He was wholly given up to sin, and, upon condition he might have the pleasures of it, he would take the wages of it, which is death, Rom. 6. 23. Blessed Paul complains that he was sold under sin, Rom. 7. 14, as a poor captive against his will; but Ahab was willing, he sold himself to sin; of choice, and as his own act and deed, he submitted to the dominion of sin. Jezebel his wife stirred him up to do wickedly. But Ahab is reprov'd, and his sin set before his eyes. The person sent, is Elijah, whose presence would dismay the tyrant, and whose strong faith and intrepid spirit qualified him for such a service. The prophet delivered his message in the vineyard, while Ahab was seizing his prey, surrounded by his officers, for his deeper mortification, and that it might be the more noticed by others. The prediction of the dogs licking Ahab's blood declared the violent death which awaited him.

Ahab vented his wrath against Elijah. That man's condition is very miserable, who has made the word of God his enemy, and very desperate, who reckons the ministers of that word his enemies, because they tell him the truth, Gal. 4. 16. Yet Ahab was a kind of penitent. He was still a proud, hardened sinner, and yet thus reduced. God can make the stoutest heart to tremble, and the proudest to humble itself. His word is quick and powerful, and is, when he pleases to make it so, like a fire and a hammer, Jer. 23. 29. It make Felix tremble. Ahab put on the garb and guise of a penitent, yet his heart was unhumbl'd and unchanged. It is no new thing to find the show of repentance, where the truth and substance are wanting. Ahab's repentance was only what might be seen of men: Seest thou how Ahab humbles himself? It was outward only; the gar-

ments rent, but not the heart. A hypocrite may go very far in the outward performances of holy duties, and yet come short of what is needful.

Though Ahab's humiliation was formal and hypocritical, it allowed the justice of God and his own sin, and put an outward honour upon the Divine law. Bad as it was, it would have been worse had he gloried in his crimes, or attempted to put the prophet to death; therefore the Lord recompensed his outward temporary repentance with a similar reward. As it was but an outside repentance, lamenting the judgment only, and not the sin, because he thereby gave some glory to God, the sentence should not be revoked, but the execution suspended. 1. This discovers the great goodness of God, and his readiness to recompense every thing that has any semblance of good in it; especially it evinces that the Lord approves of the sinner's confessing his guilt, and taking shame to himself. But the nature of Ahab's recompence shows that God does not accept of any formal services with relation to the eternal world. 2. This teaches us to notice that which is good, even in those who are not so good as they should be: let it be commended as far as it goes. 3. This gives a reason why wicked people sometimes prosper long. God is rewarding their external services with external mercies. Before the searching word of God, the most stupid conscience will sometimes be disquieted, and the stoutest heart will tremble. For a time sinners may speak and act as if truly penitent; but such appearances are a poor substitute for that repentance which is unto salvation, not to be repented of: by their fruits ye shall know them. 4. This encourages all that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe the holy gospel. If a pretending partial penitent shall go to his house reprieved, doubtless, a sincere believing penitent shall go to his house justified. We may be animated to abound in the work of the Lord, seeing he even recompenses the formal services of his enemies; and may we seek and find new-covenant blessings for ourselves and our children after us; while wicked men leave inheritances to their posterity, burdened with the curse of God, and insure destruction to their souls.

CHAPTER XXII.

Ver. 1—14. *Jehoshaphat makes a league with Ahab—False prophets encourage them to go against Ramoth-gilead.*

It is strange that Jehoshaphat should pay so much respect to a kingdom revolted from the house of David, and show so much kindness to a king revolted from the worship of God. The same easiness of temper which betrays some godly persons into friendship with the declared enemies of religion, will render it peculiarly dangerous to them. They will be drawn to connive at, and sanction such conduct and conversation as they ought to protest against with abhorrence. Persons of a timid, pliant turn, should be particularly careful of forming such intimacies, and they are the only pious people whose acquaintance men of the world will much desire.

Ahab meditated a war against the Syrians. The king of Syria promised to restore his cities, ch. 20. 34. But there is no confidence to be put in leagues extorted by distress. Whether any other cities were restored, we do not find, but Ramoth-gilead was not; a considerable city in the tribe of Gad, a levites' city, and one of the cities of refuge. Ahab blames himself and his people, that they did not bestir themselves to recover it out of the hands of the Syrians, and to chastise Benhadad's violation of his league. He engaged Jehoshaphat to join him.

At the special request of Jehoshaphat Ahab asked counsel of the prophets concerning this expedition. Whithersoever a good man goes, he desires to take God with him, will acknowledge him in all his ways, ask leave of him, and look up to him for success. Whithersoever a good man goes, he ought to take his religion with him, and not be ashamed to own it, when he is with those who have no kindness for it. Jehoshaphat had not left behind him, at Jerusalem, his affection and veneration for the word of the Lord, but avowed it, and endeavoured to introduce it into Ahab's court.

Ahab's prophets agreed to encourage this expedition. But they knew which way his inclination was. To please Jehoshaphat, they made use of the name Jehovah, He shall deliver into the hand of the king; they stole the word from the true prophets, Jer. 23. 30, and attempted to speak their language. To please Ahab, they said, Go up. They had, indeed,

probabilities on their side. Ahab had, not long since, beaten the syrians twice; he had now a good cause, and was strengthened by his alliance with Jehoshaphat; but they pretended to speak by prophecy, not by rational conjecture; by Divine, not human foresight. Zedekiah, in imitation of the true prophets, illustrated his false prophecy with a sign. He made him a pair of iron horns, representing the two kings, and their honour and power, both which were signified by horns, exaltation, and force, and with these the syrians must be pushed. Jehoshaphat could not approve this sort of preaching; it is not like what he was used to; the false prophets cannot so mimic the true, but that he who had spiritual senses exercised, could discern the fallacy, and therefore he inquires for a prophet of the Lord besides. One faithful prophet of the Lord was worth them all. Ahab has one; he owned they might inquire of the Lord by him, that he was a true prophet, and one that knew God's mind; yet he hated him, for this reason, He doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. Those are wretchedly hardened in sin, and ripening apace for ruin, who hate God's ministers, because they deal plainly with them, and faithfully warn them of their misery and danger by reason of sin, and reckon those their enemies who tell them the truth. Jehoshaphat gave too gentle a reproof to Ahab, for expressing his indignation against a faithful prophet. Such sinners as Ahab must be rebuked sharply. Micaiah was pressed by the officer who fetched him, to do like the false prophets. Worldly men, esteemed very sensible, have in all ages been alike absurd in their views of religion. They would have the preacher accommodate his doctrine to the fashion of the times, and the taste of the audience, and to prefix, Thus saith the Lord, to words that men would put into their mouths. They are ready to exclaim against a man as rude and foolish, who scruples thus to secure his own interests, and to deceive others. Ministers indeed should be accessible, teachable, and willing to take a friendly hint from any man; but declaring their determination to adhere to the word of God.

6. The word "it" is not in the original. This reply of the prophet is a remarkable instance of the ambiguity of the ancient false prophecies and heathen oracles. The words may be applied to either people, or either king.

Ver. 15—28. *Micaiah predicts the death of Ahab.*

Ahab seeming desirous to know God's mind, when, like Balaam, he was strongly bent to do his own, Micaiah bade him go, but with such an air, as plainly showed he spake it by way of derision. Ahab adjured him to tell him the truth, and not to jest with him. Being thus pressed, he plainly foretold that the king would be cut off in this expedition, and his army scattered. A believing view of the presence and glory of the King of heaven, by whose authority we speak, will raise us above the fear of our fellow-creatures.

What evil did Micaiah prophesy to Ahab, in telling him this expedition would be fatal? The greatest kindness we can do to one that is going in a dangerous way, is, to tell him of his danger. And to leave this hardened criminal without excuse, and to give a useful lesson to others, Micaiah related his vision. God had doomed Ahab to fall at Ramoth-gilead, by the army of Benhadad whom he had sinfully spared. To bring him thither, he permitted Satan to impose upon him with the hopes of success in that expedition. The evil spirit used false teachers as his ministers; this method he followed on this occasion. By this permission the Lord is said "to put a lying spirit in the mouth of all Ahab's prophets." God neither put the wickedness into their hearts, nor the lies into their mouths. He gave Ahab fair warning, and if he had not hated the truth, and loved a lie, he would not have gone up to Ramoth-gilead; but the Lord foresaw he would do so, and perish there. This matter is represented after the manner of men: we are not to imagine that God is ever put upon new counsels; or is ever at a loss for means whereby to effect his purposes; or that he needs to consult with angels, or any creature, about the methods he should take; or that he is the author of sin, or the cause of any man's either telling or believing a lie.

Micaiah returned not the blow of Zedekiah, yet, since he boasted of the Spirit, as those commonly do that know least of the Holy Spirit's operations, left him to be convinced of his error by the event. Those that will not have their mistakes rectified in time by the word of God, will be undeceived, when it is too late, by the judgments of God. Micaiah appealed to the people, that if the king

despised the word of God, they might, from his fate, learn to reverence it, and be convinced that none can long prosper who do not believe in and worship Jehovah. Jehoshaphat's silent connivance at the treatment Micaiah received, and his continued willingness to go with Ahab, were very criminal.

We should be ashamed of what, in this day, we call trials, when we consider what the servants of God have formerly endured. Yet it will be well if exemption from trouble prove not more injurious to us than persecutions did to them; for we are more easily allured and bribed into unfaithfulness and conformity to the world than driven to them by terrors and threats.

15. It may be inferred that some ironical gesture accompanied Micaiah's prediction! Numerous instances of irony are to be found in scripture.—*T. H. Horne.*

23. These men called prophets were only pretenders to prophecy, whom the wicked king of Israel had in his pay, and who knew how to suit his humour and flatter his vanity. Micaiah distinctly calls them Ahab's prophets. The address of Micaiah is not a real representation of any thing done in the heavenly world, as if the Almighty were at a loss for expedients or had any hand in the sins of his creatures. It is a parable, and tells in figurative language the events shortly to take place, and the permission on the part of God for these agents to act. It is a known idiom of the hebrew language to express things in an imperative and active form, which are to be understood only permissively.—*T. H. Horne.*

Ver. 29—40. *Death of Ahab, king of Israel.*

Ahab tried to secure himself, and exposed his friend; as if, by disguising himself, he could escape the Divine notice, and the judgments that pursued him. He basely intended to betray Jehoshaphat to the danger, that he might secure himself. See what they get that join with vicious men. How can it be expected that he should be true to his friend, who has been false to his God? Jehoshaphat was thereby brought into peril of his life, but God graciously delivered him. By his danger God let him know he was displeased with him for joining in confederacy with Ahab. He had said in compliment to Ahab, I am as thou art, and now he was indeed taken for him; they that associate with evil doers, are in danger of sharing in their plagues. By his deliverance, God let him know, that though he was displeased with him, yet he had not deserted him. God moved them to depart from him; to him he cried out, not in cowardice, but devotion, and from him his relief came.

God is a Friend that will not fail us when other friends do.

Ahab received his mortal wound in the battle, notwithstanding his endeavours to secure himself in the habit of a private soldier. Let no man think to hide himself from God's judgment. The syrian that shot him drew a bow at a venture, not aiming particularly at any man; yet God so directed the arrow, that he hit the right person, the man that was marked for destruction; those cannot escape with life, whom God hath doomed to death. He hit Ahab in the only place where this arrow of death could find entrance. That which to us seems altogether casual, is done by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

Ahab lived long enough to see part of Micaiah's prophecy accomplished. His death was lingering, he had time to feel himself die; and we may well imagine with what horror he now reflected upon the wickedness he had committed, the warnings he had slighted, Baal's altars, Naboth's vineyard, Micaiah's imprisonment; now he sees himself flattered into his own ruin; thus is he brought to the king of terrors without hope in his death. The royal corpse was brought to Samaria, and buried there, and thither were brought the bloody chariot and bloody armour in which he died. One circumstance is noticed, because there was in it the accomplishment of a prophecy—That when they brought the chariot to the pool of Samaria, to be washed, the dogs (and swine, says the greek) gathered about it, and licked the blood. The history of Ahab is here concluded in the usual form. Among his works mention is made of an ivory house which he built, so called because many parts of it were inlaid with ivory; perhaps it was intended to vie with the stately palace of the kings of Judah, which Solomon built. But what will all riches, monuments, or splendid actions avail when God shall require the sinner's soul?

38. Some have thought it difficult to reconcile this verse with ch. 21. 19, as Naboth was put to death in Jezreel, and Ahab's chariot was washed in Samaria. But the expression may be considered as referring to a similar place, or some apply it in a larger sense to that land generally.

Ver. 41—50. *Jehoshaphat's good reign over Judah.*

A short account is given of the reign of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, of which we have a much fuller narrative in the book

of Chronicles: see 2 Chron. 17. 18. 19. 20. Jehoshaphat's reign appears to have been none of the longest, but one of the best, both in respect of piety and prosperity. He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord; he prevented the mischiefs which had attended their wars with the kingdom of Israel, establishing a lasting peace, which had been a greater blessing, if he had contented himself with peace, and not carried it on to affinity with Israel. He put a deputy, or viceroy, in Edom; that kingdom was tributary to him, and therein the prophecy concerning Esau and Jacob was fulfilled, that the elder should serve the younger. Jehoshaphat pleased God, and God blessed him with strength and success.

Ver. 51—53. *Ahaziah's evil reign over Israel.*

Here is the beginning of the story of

Ahaziah, the son of Ahab; his reign was very short, not two years; some sinners God makes quick work with. A very bad character of him is given. Though he had heard of the ruin of Jeroboam's family, and had seen his own father drawn into destruction by the prophets of Baal, who had often been proved false prophets, yet he received no instruction, took no warning, but followed the example of his wicked father, and the counsel of his more wicked mother Jezebel, who was still living. Miserable are the children that not only derive corruption from their parents, but are taught by them to increase it; and unhappy, most unhappy parents are they that help to damn their children's souls! Hardened sinners rush forward, unawed and unmoved, in the ways from which others before them have been driven into everlasting misery.

THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1—8. *The revolt of Moab—Sickness of Ahaziah, king of Israel—Elijah's message to him.*

Ahaziah, the wicked king of Israel, is under God's rebukes, by his rod and by his word. He is crossed in his affairs. When he rebelled against God, Moab revolted from the subjection they had long paid to the kings of Israel. Sin weakens and impoverishes us. Man's revolt from God is often punished by the rebellion of those who owe subjection to him.

Ahaziah fell down through a lattice, and was much bruised with the fall. Wherever we go, there is but a step between us and death. A man's house is his castle, but not to secure him against the judgments of God. The cracked lattice is as fatal to the son, when God pleases to make it so, as the bow drawn at a venture was to the father. Royal palaces do not always yield firm footing. The whole creation, which groans under the burden of man's sin, will, at length, sink and break under the weight, like this lattice. He is never safe that has God for his enemy.

Ahaziah's inquiry was foolish: Shall I recover? We should be more thoughtful what will become of us after death, than how, or when, or where we shall die; and more desirous to be told how we may con-

duct ourselves well in our sickness, and get good to our souls by it, than whether we shall recover. Sending to Baal-zebub was very wicked; no less a reproach to his reason than to his religion. Baal-zebub signifies the lord of a fly. If Ahaziah send to the god of Ekron, instead of the God of Israel, that fills the measure of his iniquity, and brings upon him a sentence of death. They that will not inquire of the word of God for their comfort, shall be made to hear it, whether they will or no, to their amazement. Elijah faithfully reprov'd his sin; It is because you think not only that the God of Israel is not able to tell you, but that there is no God at all in Israel; else you would not send so far for a Divine answer. Atheism, either direct or indirect, is the cause and adds to the malignity of our departures from God. Surely we think there is no God in Israel, when we live at large, make flesh our arm, and seek a portion in the things of this world. Elijah was clad in a hairy garment, and had a leathern girdle about him, plain and homely in his garb. John Baptist, the Elias of the New Testament, herein resembled him, for his clothes were made of hair-cloth, and he was girt with a leathern girdle, Matt. 3. 4. He that was clothed with the Spirit, despised all rich

and gay clothing. Ahaziah is ready to cry out, as his father did, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? Let sinners consider that the word which took hold of their fathers, is still as quick and powerful: see Zech. 1. 6; Heb. 4. 12.

2. The flat roofs of the eastern houses, and the galleries surrounding their courts, are sometimes protected by parapet walls, and sometimes by railings or lattice work. Ahaziah probably leant carelessly against such a lattice, and in giving way, he fell into the court. This event illustrates the law, Deut. 22. 8.

Ver. 9—18. *Fire called from heaven by Elijah upon Ahaziah's messengers.*

The captain that was sent with his fifty soldiers found Elijah on the top of a hill. Elijah now was far from absconding as formerly; experience of God's protection made him more bold. The captain called him a man of God, not that he believed him to be so, or revered him as such; had he really looked upon him as a prophet, he would not have attempted to make him his prisoner. Elijah called for fire from heaven to consume this haughty, daring sinner, not to secure himself, nor to avenge himself, but to prove his mission, and to reveal the wrath of God from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Doubtless Elijah did this by a Divine impulse, and yet our Saviour would not allow the disciples to draw it into a precedent, Luke 9. 54. The dispensation of the Spirit and of grace by no means allowed it. "You are not aware what manner of spirit you are actuated by, and how different from that of Elias: he did it in holy zeal, you in passion; he was concerned for God's glory, you for your own reputation only." God judges men's practices by their principles, and his judgment is according to truth.

Another captain is sent with his fifty; he is as imperious as the last, and more in haste. Elijah called again for fire from heaven, which instantly laid this captain and his fifty dead upon the spot. They that will sin like others, must expect to suffer like them; God is inflexibly just. The officers and soldiers doubtless had been instruments of Ahab and Jezebel in persecution. The third captain humbled himself, and cast himself upon the mercy of God and Elijah. It does not appear that Ahaziah ordered him to do so; but he took warning by the fate of those who went before him; and instead of summoning the prophet down, fell down, and

begged for his life and the lives of his soldiers, acknowledging their own evil desert, and the prophet's power. There is nothing to be got by contending with God; if we would prevail with him, it must be by supplication; and those are wise for themselves, who learn submission from the fatal consequences of obstinacy in others.

Elijah did more than grant the request of this third captain. God is not more severe with those that stand out against him, than he is ready to show mercy to those who repent, and submit to him; never any found it in vain to cast themselves upon the mercy of God. This captain not only has his life spared, but is permitted to carry his point; Elijah, being so commanded by the angel, went down with him to the king. Thus he showed that he before refused not to come because he feared the king or court. He came to the king, and told him that he should surely and shortly die. The courage of faith has often struck terror into the heart of the proudest sinner. So thunderstruck is Ahaziah with this message, that neither he, nor any of those about him, offer him any violence. Who can harm those whom God will shelter?

If we are reconciled to God by faith in the Saviour, and are walking in his ways, death never can come in a wrong time or manner; but to the impenitent and unbelieving he is the king of terrors. The bible teaches us to be always ready; it declares the way of acceptance, and the path of duty. The prediction is accomplished; Ahaziah died. Often has it been observed, that men upon a death-bed, and aware of their situation, have appeared more trifling, profane, avaricious, or cruel than at former periods. In many ways men continually act in manners which cannot be explained except upon the principle—The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. All warns us to seek the Lord while he may be found; and his servants will witness the destruction of all his enemies.

16. The beds in eastern countries are usually placed in a raised alcove at the end of the room, to go up to which there are a few steps.

17. It is thought that Jehoshaphat admitted his son Jehoram to reign over Judah jointly with himself, several years before his death: see ch. 3. 1.

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1—8. *Elijah takes leave of Elisha, and divides Jordan.*

None but Enoch had been exempted from the general sentence denounced against sinful man, Dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return. But it seems the Lord had let Elijah know that he intended to distinguish him in the same manner, and that the time was at hand. He therefore went to the different schools of the prophets to give them his last exhortations and blessing. God looked down upon the present dark and degenerate state of the church, and would thus give a very sensible proof of another life after this, and draw the hearts of the faithful few upward toward himself, and that other life. In the translation of Elijah, he gave a type and figure of the ascension of Christ, and the opening of the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

Elisha had determined, as long as he continued on earth, to cleave to him, and not to leave him. He desired to be edified by his holy, heavenly converse as long as he staid on earth; it had always been profitable, but, we may suppose, now, more so than ever. We should do all the spiritual good we can one to another, and get all we can one by another, while we are together, because we are to be together but a short time. Elisha had long followed Elijah, and he would not leave him now when he hoped for the parting blessing. Let not those who follow Christ come short by tiring at last.

The sons of the prophets had intelligence that Elijah was shortly to be removed. Elisha knew it; sorrow had filled his heart upon this account, therefore he did not need to be told of it. He speaks not peevishly, or in contempt of the sons of the prophets, but as one that was himself, and would have them composed and sedate, and with an awful silence expecting the event. They went to witness it at a distance, though they might not attend close. God so ordered it, that they might be eye-witnesses of the honour Heaven did to that prophet, who was despised and rejected of men.

Elijah and Elisha might have gone over Jordan as other passengers, but God would magnify Elijah in his departure, as he did Joshua in his entrance, by dividing this river, Josh. 3. 7. As Moses with his rod divided the sea, so Elijah with his mantle divided Jordan, both the badges

of their office. These waters, of old, yielded to the ark, now, to the prophet's mantle, as a token of God's presence. When God will take up his faithful ones to heaven, death is the Jordan which, immediately before their translation, they must pass through, and they find a way through it, a safe and comfortable way. The death of Christ has divided those waters, that the ransomed of the Lord may pass over. O death, where is thy sting, thy hurt, thy terror?

3. It appears that the state of the priesthood, and the almost total cessation of the spirit of prophecy in the days of Eli, caused schools or seminaries to be instituted for the instruction of those who were to succeed in the sacred ministry. These schools seem to have been at first in the cities of the levites. The disciples were called sons of the prophets. Some venerable and divinely inspired prophet presided over them, who was called their father. Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha were among these fathers, and are so called. The sons of the prophets lived together as a community. They were taught the law, and the principles of religion, as well as psalmody, or, as it is termed in some places, prophesying, with harps, psalteries, and cymbals. They attended lectures and religious exercises together, and ate with their masters. It appears that the persons usually came from these establishments whom God called forth to exercise the prophetic office in a peculiar or prominent manner. Thus Amos considered his call as uncommon. These schools continued, it is supposed, till the babylonish captivity, and were succeeded by the synagogues and schools of the doctors or teachers of the law.

Ver. 9—12. *Elijah is taken up into heaven.*

Elijah bade Elisha ask what blessing he should leave him at parting. He does not say, Ask of me when I am gone; in heaven I shall be better able to befriend thee; but, Ask before I go. Our friends on earth may be spoken to, and can give an answer; but we have not access to any friend in heaven but Christ, and God in him. Elisha prays for a double portion of Elijah's spirit; he asks not for wealth, honour, or exemption from trouble, but to be qualified for the service of God and his generation. He asks for the Spirit, not that the gifts and graces of the Spirit were in Elijah's power to give, therefore he says not, "Give me the Spirit," he knew very well it was God's gift, but, "Let it be upon me, intercede with God for this, for me." Christ bade his disciples ask what they would, and promised to send the Spirit, with much more authority and assurance than Elijah could do. It is a holy ambition to covet earnestly the best gifts, those which will render us most serviceable to God and our brethren. We all ought, both min-

isters and people, to set before us the examples of our predecessors, to labour after their spirit, and to be earnest with God for that grace which carried them through their work, and enabled them to finish well. That fulness, whence prophets and apostles derived all their supply, is still replenished as of old, and we are invited to ask large supplies from it. Diligent attendance upon his master's instructions, and observance of his example, particularly in his last hours, would be proper means of obtaining much of his spirit. The comforts of departing saints, and their experiences, help both to gild our comforts and to steel our resolutions. Or, perhaps, this was only a sign; If God favour thee so as to give thee a sight of me when I ascend, take that for a token that he will do this for thee, and depend upon it. Christ's disciples saw him ascend, and were assured that they should, in a little time, be filled with his Spirit.

Elijah is carried up to heaven in a fiery chariot. Many curious questions might be asked about this, which could not be answered. Let it suffice that we are told, 1. What his Lord, when he came, found him doing. He was talking with Elisha, instructing and encouraging him, directing him in his work, and quickening him to it. He was engaged in edifying discourse, as one concerned about the kingdom of God among men. We mistake, if we think preparation for heaven is carried on only by contemplation and acts of devotion. Thinking of Divine things is good, but talking of them, if it come from the heart, is better, because for edification, 1 Cor. 14. 4. Christ ascended as he was blessing his disciples. As we know not the time of our departure, we should endeavour to be always ready, and to mind our proper work with increased assiduity when warned that the time approaches. 2. His Lord sent for Elijah a chariot of fire and horses of fire. The souls of all the faithful are carried by invisible angels into the bosom of Abraham; but Elijah being to carry his body with him, this heavenly guard was visible. The angels are called, in scripture, cherubim and seraphim, and their appearance here answers to both those names; for seraphim signifies fiery, and God is said to make them a flame of fire, Psal. 104. 4. Cherubim, as many think, signifies chariots, and they are called the chariots of God,

Psal. 68. 17. See the readiness of the angels to do the will of God, for the good of the heirs of salvation. The chariot and horses appeared like fire, something very glorious, not hot for burning, but brightness; not to torture or consume Elijah, but to render his ascension conspicuous and illustrious in the eyes of those that stood afar off to view it. Elijah had burned with holy zeal for God and his honour, and now with heavenly fire he was refined and translated. 3. He was separated from Elisha; this chariot parted them. The dearest friends must part. Elisha had protested he would not leave him, yet is left behind by him. 4. He went up by a whirlwind into heaven. By this instance, and that of Enoch, God gave a glimpse of the life and immortality which are brought to light by the gospel, of the glory reserved for the bodies of the saints, and the opening of the kingdom of heaven to all believers, as then to Elijah. It was also a figure of Christ's ascension.

If we obtain eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, we need not greatly regret that we pass not the same way to it as Enoch and Elijah, being assured that we shall be more than conquerors in the last conflict, through him that loved us. Our souls will ascend directly to heaven, our bodies will at length be raised incorruptible, and then death will be swallowed up in victory.

Elisha saw it; thus he received the sign by which he was assured of the grant of his request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit; he looked stedfastly toward heaven, whence he was to expect that gift, as the disciples, Acts 1. 10. He rent his own clothes, in token of the sense he had of his own and the public loss. Though Elijah was gone triumphantly to heaven, yet this world could ill spare him, and therefore his removal ought to be much regretted by the survivors. Surely their hearts are hard, whose eyes are dry, when God, by taking away faithful, useful men, calls for weeping and mourning. Elisha gave him a very honourable character, as the reason why he thus lamented the loss of him. He saw his own condition like that of a fatherless child thrown upon the world. Christ, when he left his disciples, did not leave them orphans, John 14. 18. The public had lost its best guard; he was the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. Elijah was to them, by his

counsels, reproofs, and prayers, better than the strongest force of chariot and horse, and kept off the judgments of God; his departure was in this an irreparable loss.

Christ bequeathed to his disciples his precious gospel, like Elijah's mantle; the token of the Divine power being exerted to subvert the empire of Satan, and to set up the kingdom of God in the world. The same gospel remains with us; though the miraculous powers are withdrawn, it still is attended with Divine energy for the conversion and salvation of sinners.

Ver. 13—18. *Elisha receives Elijah's mantle, and is manifested to be his successor.*

Elijah left his mantle to Elisha; though in itself of small value, yet, as a token of the descent of the Spirit upon him, it was more than if he had bequeathed to him thousands of gold and silver. Elisha took it up, not as a sacred relic to be worshipped, but as a significant garment to be worn. He was possessed of Elijah's power to divide Jordan. In dividing the waters, he made use of Elijah's mantle. Now that Elijah was taken to heaven, Elisha inquired, 1. After God—When our creature-comforts are removed, we have a God to go to, who lives for ever. 2. After the God of Elijah, the God that Elijah served, and honoured, and pleaded for, and adhered to, when Israel had deserted him. The Lord God of the holy prophets is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; but what will it avail us to have the mantles of those that are gone, their places, their books, if we have not their spirit, their God? But having the same exceeding great and precious promises as the primitive christians, the same throne of grace, the same Mediator, the same Almighty God and Father as they had, if we have the same precious faith, we need not fear breaking through all difficulties and opposing enemies, and at last passing through the Jordan of death as on dry ground.

The ready submission of the sons of the prophets, was great encouragement to Elisha, and helped to clear his call. They witnessed the division of Jordan, and took that as a convincing evidence that the Spirit of the Lord rested upon Elisha. The sons of the prophets made a needless search for Elijah. They urged Elisha till he was ashamed to oppose it any further, lest he should be thought wanting to his old master, or loth to resign the mantle

again. Wise men may yield to that, for the sake of peace, and the good opinion of others, which yet their judgment is against, as needless and fruitless. The issue made them ashamed of their proposal. This would make them the more willing to acquiesce in Elisha's judgment another time. Traversing hills and valleys will never bring us to Elijah, but the imitation of his holy faith and zeal will in due time.

Ver. 19—25. *Elisha heals the waters of Jericho—Children that mocked Elisha, destroyed by bears.*

Elisha had, in this respect, a double portion of Elijah's spirit, that he wrought more miracles. Two are recorded in these verses. Here is a blessing upon the waters of Jericho, made effectual to heal them. Jericho was built in disobedience to a command, and in defiance of a threatening; yet, when built, it was not ordered to be demolished again, nor were God's prophets or people forbidden to dwell in it. We find Christ at Jericho, Luke 19. 1.

The men of Jericho represented their grievance. God's faithful prophets love to be employed; it is wisdom to make use of them while their light is with us. The situation was pleasant; but they had neither wholesome water to drink, nor fruitful soil to yield them food; and what pleasure could they take then in their prospect? Water is a common mercy, which we should estimate by the greatness of the calamity which the want or unwholesomeness of it would be. Elisha soon redressed the grievance. Prophets should endeavour to make every place to which they come better for them, endeavouring to sweeten bitter spirits, and to make barren souls fruitful, by the due application of the word of God. Elisha will heal their waters; but they must furnish him with salt in a new cruse. If salt had been proper to season the water, yet what could so small a quantity do, and what the better for being in a new cruse? But those who would be helped must be employed, and their faith and obedience tried. Elisha cast the salt into the spring, and so healed the streams, and the ground they watered. The way to reform men's lives, is to renew their hearts; let those be seasoned with the salt of grace, for out of them are the issues of life. Purify the heart, and that will cleanse the hands. He did not pre-

tend to do this by his own power, but in God's name; Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters. He is but the instrument, the channel through which God is pleased to convey this healing virtue. It was an apt emblem of the effect produced by the grace of God on the sinful heart of man. When that remedy is communicated, a blessed change takes place through all the powers of the soul; repentance, faith, and love of God and man will issue in good works, regulated according to the holy law of God and the example of the Redeemer. Whole families, towns, and cities, sometimes assume a new appearance through the preaching of the gospel; wickedness and evil have been changed into fruitfulness in the works of righteousness, which are, through Christ, to the praise and glory of God.

Here is a curse on the children of Bethel, effectual to destroy them; for it was not a curse causeless. Mocking the messengers of the Lord, and misusing the prophets, was one of the crying sins of Israel, as 2 Chron. 36. 16. These youths had doubtless been trained up in idolatry, and taught to despise and ridicule the prophets of the Lord. For it was his character, as a prophet, that they designed to abuse. They bade him "go up," reflecting on the taking up of Elijah into heaven. These children had learned of their idolatrous parents to use bad language, especially to prophets.

Elisha heard their taunts; at length the fire of holy zeal for God was kindled, and he turned and looked upon them. A grave and severe look should have obliged them to retire; but they were not ashamed, therefore he both imprecated and denounced the following judgment; not in personal revenge for the indignity to himself, but as the mouth of Divine justice to punish the dishonour to God. His summons was immediately obeyed; two she-bears came out of an adjacent wood, and killed forty-two of these young persons. In this the prophet must be justified, for he did it by Divine impulse. If the Holy Spirit had not dictated Elisha's solemn curse, the providence of God would not have followed it with a judgment.

God must be glorified, as a righteous God that hates sin, and will reckon for it. Let children be afraid of speaking wicked words, for God notices what they say. Let them not mock at any for de-

fects in mind or body, but pity them rather; especially it is at their peril, if they jeer God's people or ministers, and scoff at any for well doing. Let parents that would have comfort in their children, train them up well, and do their utmost betimes to drive out the foolishness that is bound up in their hearts; for, as bishop Hall says, In vain do we look for good of those children whose education we have neglected; and in vain do we grieve for the miscarriages which our care might have prevented.

We can scarcely conceive the horror of the parents of Bethel at the sight of the bodies of their children, who had been taught by them the impiety which brought down this dreadful judgment. But what will be the anguish of those parents, at the great decisive day, who witness the everlasting condemnation of their offspring, occasioned by their own example, carelessness, or bad instruction!

Elisha returned to Samaria, where, being a public place, this father of the prophets might be most serviceable. He can never be a profitable seer, who is either always or never alone.

A people ought to make all the profitable improvement of their ministers they can, while they have them; for what bitterness, barrenness, and death God can cure by their gospel ministrations!—(10.)

23. The original word, here rendered "little children," also means young persons who are grown up. The same word is applied to Isaac when twenty-eight years old, and to Joseph when thirty-nine, and to Rehoboam when forty. The town of Bethel was one of the principal seats of Ahab's idolatry. It is probable these young men came out of the city, and insulted the prophet at the instigation of Baal's priests, alluding to Elijah's ascension. Elisha as a minister of the Supreme Governor of the world, by his order, and in his name, declared the curse, or foretold the punishment which was about to be inflicted upon these profligate idolaters.—*T. H. Horne.*

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1—5. *Reign of Jehoram, king of Israel.*

Jehoram saw his father and brother cut off for worshipping Baal; he took warning by God's judgments on them, and put away the image. So far was well, yet Jehoram did not destroy the worship of Baal among the people, and he maintained the worship of the calves. Those do not truly repent or reform who only part with the sins they lose by, but continue their affection to the sins that they

get by. Moab had rebelled against Israel immediately upon the death of his father. The tribute which the king of Moab paid was very considerable. The riches of kings in those days was more in cattle than coin.

Ver. 6—19. *War with Moab—The armies of Israel, Judah, and Edom, being distressed for water, are relieved at the intercession of Elisha.*

Jehoshaphat had like to have paid dear for his joining with Ahab, yet he joined with his son, and this expedition also had nearly been fatal to him. There is nothing got by being yoked with unbelievers. Before the army of the confederates saw the face of an enemy, they were all in danger of perishing for want of water. God suffers his people, by their own improvidence, to bring themselves into distress, that the wisdom, power, and goodness of his providence may be glorified in their relief. The king of Israel laments the distress and the danger it put them in. He had called these kings together, yet he charges it upon Providence, and reflects upon that as unkind. Thus the foolishness of man perverteth his way, and then his heart fretteth against the Lord, Prov. 19. 3.

It was well that Jehoshaphat inquired of the Lord now, but it had been much better if he had done it before he engaged in this war. Good men are sometimes remiss, and neglect their duty, till necessity and affliction drive them to it. We may wonder that Elisha should follow the camp unasked, unobserved, and in such obscurity. We may suppose it was by special direction from Heaven. Thus does God go before his people with the blessings of his goodness, and provide his oracles even for those that provide them not for themselves. It would often be bad with us, if God did not take more care of us, both for soul and body, than we do for ourselves.

The kings went to Elisha. He was very plain with the wicked king of Israel. He was not imposed upon; he knew that Baal's prophets were still dear to him. The world and the flesh have ruled you, let them help you; why should God be inquired of by you? Ezek. 14. 3. Jehoram now cares not for Baal's prophets, but is a humble suitor to the God of Israel and his prophet. But Elisha showed great respect to the godly king of Judah, and for his sake would inquire

of the Lord for them all. It is good to be with those that have God's favour, and his prophet's love. Wicked people often fare the better for the friendship and society of the godly. Elisha composed himself to receive instructions from God: his mind was disturbed at the sight of Jehoram, though not in a sinful heat or passion. He called for a minstrel or musician. To hear God's praises sweetly sung, would cheer his spirits, and settle his mind. We find a company of prophets prophesying with a psaltery and a tabret before them, 1 Sam. 10. 5. Those that desire communion with God, must keep their spirits quiet and serene.

Elisha being refreshed, and having the tumult of his spirits allayed by this Divine music, God, by him, gave assurance that they should speedily be supplied with water. To try their faith and obedience, he bids them make the valley full of pits to receive the water. Those who expect God's blessings, must dig the pools for the rain to fill, as in the valley of Baca, and thus make even that a well, Psa. 84. 6. We need not inquire whence the water came. He that caused the rock to pour forth rivers can never want resources. God is not tied to second causes. And that supply was an earnest of victory. As God gives freely to the unworthy, so he gives richly, like himself, more than we are able to ask or think. His grants outdo our requests and expectations. They that sincerely seek for the dew of God's grace, shall have it, and by it be made more than conquerors. It is promised they should be masters of the rebellious country, and they are to lay it waste. Those who are expressly commissioned of God, as the israelites of old and as magistrates at present, are authorized, nay, required to execute severities which in others would be extremely criminal.

11. An expression denoting that Elisha had been with Elijah as his constant attendant or servitor, 1 Kings 19. 21. Before meals it was usual to pour water on the hands of the guests.

Ver. 20—27. *Water supplied—Moab overcome.*

This relief came at the time of the offering of the morning sacrifices upon the altar at Jerusalem, a time universally known, intimating that the deliverance was vouchsafed through those sacrifices and worship. That time Elisha chose for his hour of prayer; it is likely looking toward the temple, for so they were

to do in their prayers, when they were going to battle, or at a distance, 1 Kings 8. 44. This was in token of his communion with the temple service, and his expectation of success by virtue of the great Sacrifice. We cannot now pitch upon any hour more acceptable than another, because our High Priest is always appearing for us, to present and plead his sacrifice. That time God chose for the hour of mercy, to put honour upon the daily sacrifice which had been despised.

It is a peculiar blessing to be favoured with the society of those who have power with God, and can prevail by their intercessions. The world of ungodly sinners enjoys many advantages for the sake of a few excellent persons who may not be much known or valued amongst them. A kingdom may be upheld and prosper in consequence of the fervent supplications of those who are dear to God. May we place our highest regard upon such as are most precious in his account.—(60.)

The moabites were easily drawn into their own delusions. What we wish we readily believe. They ran fatally upon their own destruction. The israelites pursued them into their own country, which they laid waste. Who ever hardened his heart against God, and prospered? It appears that the king of Moab sacrificed his own eldest son to obtain the favour of Chemosh his god, which, being a devil, delighted in blood and murder, and the destruction of mankind. The dearer any thing was to them, the more acceptable those idolaters thought it must be, if offered in sacrifice to their gods, and therefore burnt their children in the fire to their honour. To terrify the besiegers he did it upon the wall, in their sight, that they might see what desperate courses he resolved to take rather than surrender, and how dear he would sell his city and life. He intended hereby to exasperate and enrage his own subjects against them. This effect it had; there was great indignation against Israel for driving him to this extremity. They raised the siege, and returned.

When sinners are saying, Peace, peace, destruction comes upon them. Desperation will succeed their mad presumption, and in Satan's service and at his suggestion, such horrid deeds have been perpetrated, as cause the natural feelings of humanity to recoil. It is well not to urge

the worst of men to such extremities; we should rather recede and leave them to the judgment of God.

27. In times of great danger and extremity, it has been customary among heathen nations to offer human sacrifices. So cruel was pagan superstition.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1—7. *Elisha multiplies the widow's oil.*

Elisha's miracles were acts of real charity; Christ's were so; not only great wonders, but great favours, to those for whom they were wrought. God magnifies his goodness with his power.

Elisha readily received a poor widow's complaint. She was a prophet's widow. Marriage is honourable in all, and consistent with the most sacred professions. Her husband died poor, and in debt. As she had no property to discharge the debt, the creditor proceeded to sell her sons for slaves to pay himself. Those that leave their families under a load of debt disproportioned to their estates, know not what trouble they entail. It is the duty of all who profess to follow the Lord, and especially of ministers, while they trust to God for daily bread, not to tempt him by negligence or extravagance, nor to contract debts; for nothing tends more to bring reproach upon the gospel, nothing creates more prejudice against it, nothing distracts men's minds more while they live, or distresses their families more when they are gone. Many hardships, therefore, should be endured, many pleasant things renounced, rather than occasion such fatal consequences. Yet in the mysteries of Providence, this may sometimes prove the case of those who are eminent for piety; and the unsuspecting simplicity of good men sometimes exposes them to the designs of the artful.

In her distress the poor widow goes to Elisha, as depending upon the promise, that the seed of the righteous shall not be forsaken. The generation of the upright may expect help from God's providence, and countenance from his prophets. He effectually relieved her distress, put her in a way to pay her debt, and to maintain herself and her family. This was done by miracle, but indicates what is the best method of charity, and the greatest kindness one can do to the poor, which is to help them to improve what little they have, by their own industry and ingenuity.

Elisha found she had nothing to sell

but one pot of oil. If she had had any valuables, he would have bidden her part with them, to enable her to be just to her creditors. We cannot reckon that really or comfortably our own, which is not so until all our debts are paid. If she had not had this pot of oil, the Divine power could have supplied her; but having this, it will work upon this, and so teach us to make the best of what we have. The prophet, knowing her to have credit among her neighbours, bids her borrow of them empty vessels. The oil was to be multiplied in the pouring, as the other widow's meal in the spending. The way to increase what we have, is to use it; unto him that so hath, shall be given. It is not hoarding the talents, but trading with them, that doubles them. It must be poured out by herself: it is after our diligent endeavours we may expect the blessing of God to enrich us, both for this world and the other. What we have, will increase best in our own hand. She firmly believed the Divine power and goodness, and obeyed the prophet. The oil continued flowing as long as she had any empty vessels to receive it. We are never straitened in God, and in his power and bounty, and the riches of his grace; all our straitness is in ourselves. It is our faith that fails, not his promise. He gives above what we ask: were there more vessels, there is enough in God to fill them; enough for all, enough for each. Was this pot of oil exhausted, as long as there were any vessels to be filled from it? And shall we fear lest the golden oil which flows from the very root and fatness of the good Olive, should fail, as long as there are any lamps to be supplied from it? Zech. 4. 12. But at length all the vessels of mercy shall be filled with the Lord's goodness; and the Redeemer's all-sufficiency will only be stayed from supplying the wants of sinners and saving their souls, when no more apply to him for salvation.

The prophet directed her what to do with the oil. She must not keep it for her own use. She must pay her debt with the money she received for her oil. Though her creditors were too rigorous with her, yet they must not therefore lose their debt. Her first care must be to discharge that, even before she makes any provision for her children. It is one of the fundamental laws of the christian religion, that we render to all their due, pay

every just debt, give every one his own, though we leave ever so little for ourselves; and this, not of constraint, but willingly and without grudging; not only for wrath, to avoid being sued, but also for conscience' sake. Those who bear an honest mind, cannot with pleasure eat their daily bread, unless it be their own bread. The rest she and her children must live upon; that is, upon the money received for the oil, with which they must put themselves into a capacity of getting an honest livelihood. No doubt, she did as the man of God directed; and hence let those who are poor and in distress, be encouraged to trust God for supply in the way of duty. Verily, thou shalt be fed, though not feasted. It is true, we cannot now expect miracles, yet we may expect mercies, if we wait on God, and seek to him. Let widows particularly, and prophets' widows in a special manner, depend upon him. He that hath all hearts in his hand, need not employ a miracle to procure as effectual a supply in such a case. Let those whom God has blessed with plenty, use it for the glory of God, and under the direction of his word: let them do justly with it, as this widow did, and serve God cheerfully in the use of it; and, as Elisha, be ready to do good.

Ver. 8—17. *Elisha obtains for the shunammite the blessing of a son.*

Elisha seems to have dwelt at mount Carmel, but went through the land to visit the schools of the prophets, and to instruct the people. A woman of wealth and piety at Shunem invited him, when passing, to come to her house. At first she with some difficulty prevailed, but afterward he called when he came that way. Her husband appears to have been a pious person, and by his approval she prepared a quiet, retired lodging for the prophet. The plain, simple manner in which the chamber was furnished is worthy of our notice. Elisha offered to use his interest for an office for her husband, civil or military; or if she had any complaint to make, any petition that needed the countenance of the higher powers. Elisha had got an interest by his late services, and a good man can take as much pleasure in serving others, as in raising himself. But she needed not any good offices of this kind. It is a happiness to dwell among our own people, that love and respect us, and to whom we are in a capacity of doing good. It would be well

with many, if they did but know when they are well off.

If the world afford any perfect contentment, it is in a middle state; equally distant from penury and excess; it is in calm freedom, tranquillity, a sweet enjoyment of ourselves and ours.—(34.)

Gehazi told Elisha she had no child, and if Elisha could obtain this favour from God for her, it would remove what, at present, was her only grievance. Those are the most welcome kindnesses, which are most suited to our necessities. He sent for her immediately; she very humbly and respectfully stood at the door, and he assured her that within a year she should bring forth a son. The event, within the time limited, confirmed the truth of the promise. We may well imagine what joy this brought to the family. Thus the Lord sees the secret wish which is suppressed in obedience to his will, and he will hear the prayers of his servants in behalf of their benefactors, by communicating unasked-for and unexpected mercies; nor must the professions of men of God be supposed to be delusive like those of men of the world.

Ver. 18—37. *The death of the shunammite's son—He is restored to life at Elisha's intercession.*

Here is the sudden death of the child. He was so far past the perils of infancy, that he was able to go to the field; but the heat overcame the child, and he complained to his father. Whither should we go with our complaints, but to our heavenly Father? Thither the Spirit of adoption brings believers with all their grievances, all their desires, teaching them to cry with groanings that cannot be uttered, My head, my head; my heart, my heart. The father sent him to his mother; the attack proved fatal, he slept the sleep of death, well in the morning and dead by noon. All the mother's tenderness cannot keep him alive; a child of promise, a child of prayer, and given in love, yet taken away! But how admirably does the prudent, pious mother guard her lips, under this surprising affliction! Not one peevish word from her; a genuine daughter of Abraham's faith, she accounts that God is able to raise him from the dead, from whence at first she received him in a figure, Heb. 11. 19. Such confidence had she of God's goodness, that she was ready to believe that he would restore what he had now taken away. By this faith, women re-

ceived their dead raised to life, Heb. 11. 35. In this faith she laid her son on the prophet's bed, expecting that he would stand her friend. O woman, great is thy faith! He that wrought it, would not frustrate it. The sorrowful mother begged leave of her husband to go to the prophet. On the feasts of the Lord, she used to go to the assembly in which Elisha presided, with other believers, to hear the word, and to join in prayers and praises. She did not think it enough to have Elisha's help sometimes in her own family, but, though a woman of rank, attended on public worship.

The prophet, seeing her at a distance, sent his servant to inquire whether any thing was amiss. It well becomes the men of God, with tenderness and concern, to inquire about the welfare of their friends and their families. The answer was general, It is well. All well, and yet the child dead in the house! When God calls away our dearest relations by death, it becomes us quietly to say, It is well both with us and them. It is well, for all is well that God does; all is well with them that are gone, if they are gone to heaven; and all well with us that stay behind, if by the affliction we are furthered in our way thither.

When she came to the prophet, she threw herself at his feet, as one troubled and in grief. God discovered things to his prophets as he saw fit, not always as they desired. God did not show this to the prophet, because he might know it from the woman herself. What she said was very touching. When any creature-comfort is taken from us, it is well if we can say, through grace, that we did not set our hearts inordinately upon it; for if we did, we have reason to fear it was given in anger, and taken away in wrath. But she was ready to think it had been better she had never had this child, than to be deprived of him, when she began to have comfort in him. The loss of a mercy should not make us undervalue the gift of it. Or, she is pleading with the prophet for the raising of the child to life again. However the providence of God may disappoint us, we may be sure the promise of God never did, nor ever will deceive us: hope in that will not make us ashamed.

Elisha first despatched his servant in great haste, for the recovery of the child, but that expedient failed. At length he himself arrived, yet even then he felt his

want of ability to effect the change he wished. But he cried unto God in faith; and through his repeated and ardent supplications, the beloved son was restored alive to his mother.—(60.)

It is difficult to determine what the prophet meant by sending Gehazi. In the raising of dead souls to spiritual life, ministers can do no more by their own power than Gehazi. They lay the word, like the prophet's staff, before their faces, but there is neither voice nor hearing, till Christ, by his Spirit, comes himself. It is not prophesying upon dry bones, that will put life into them; breath must come from Heaven and breathe upon the slain. And it is instructive to compare the manner in which Elijah and Elisha wrought their miracles, especially in raising the dead, with that of Christ. Every thing in the former expressed inability in *themselves*, and entire dependence upon *another* for his interposition. But Jesus wrought by his own power; he spake and it was done: Damsel, arise; Young man, I say unto thee, Arise; Lazarus, come forth. He was powerful and faithful as a Son, the Lord of life; but Elijah and Elisha did it by petition as servants. Elisha's great attention showed his earnest desire, and gave a sign of that Divine power which he depended on for the accomplishment of this great work. Those that would be instrumental in conveying spiritual life to dead souls, must thus affect themselves with their case, and labour fervently in prayer for them. Though the minister cannot communicate Divine life to his fellow-sinners, he must use every means with as much assiduity as if he could do so.

19. During the hot season of the year, in the east, people frequently die from exposure to the sun, Psal. 121. 6.

31. "Not revived:" death being often and fitly compared to a sleep, as Psal. 76. 5; Dan. 12. 2, because of the resurrection which follows it.—*Poole*.

Ver. 38—44. *The miracle of healing the pottage and feeding the sons of the prophets.*

There was a dearth in the land, for the wickedness of those that dwelt therein; we read of the same ch. 8. 1. A famine of bread there was, but not of hearing the word of God, for Elisha had the sons of the prophets sitting before him, to hear his wisdom, who were taught, that they might teach others. Two instances we have here of the care Elisha took about their food. Christ twice fed those whom he preached to.

Elisha made hurtful food to become safe and wholesome. He ordered his servant to provide food for their bodies, while he was breaking to them the bread of life for their souls. The sons of the prophets should be examples of temperance, content with plain food: if a mess of pottage be all the dinner, let them remember that this great prophet entertained himself and his guests no better. One of the servitors, sent to gather herbs, by mistake brought that which was noxious, or very nauseous, wild gourds they are called. Some think it was coloquintida, a herb strongly medicinal, and, if not qualified, dangerous. If any of the fruits of the earth be hurtful, it is an effect of the curse, for the original blessing made all good. This pottage was soon found by the taste of it to be dangerous, so that they cried out, There is death in the pot. The table often becomes a snare, and that which should be for our welfare, proves a trap, which is a good reason why we should not feed ourselves without fear. When we are receiving the supports and comforts of life, we must keep up an expectation of death, and a fear of sin.

We may here remark the goodness of God in giving us the senses of smelling and tasting, to keep watch as it were that nothing prejudicial may be received into the stomach. But through man's sinfulness death most frequently lurks under luxurious and relishing food, which tempts men to excessive indulgence.

Elisha immediately cured the bad taste, and prevented the bad consequences of this unwholesome pottage. The change was not owing to the meal, that was the sign only, not the means, but to the Divine power. Now all was well, not only no death, but no harm in the pot; we must acknowledge God's goodness in making our food wholesome and nourishing; I am the Lord that healeth thee.

Elisha also made a little food go a great way. He had a present brought him of twenty barley loaves or cakes, and some ears of corn. It is said to be of the first-fruits, which was God's due out of their increase. The priests and levites being all at Jerusalem, the religious people, with good reason, looked upon the prophets as God's receivers, and brought their first-fruits to them, which helped to maintain their schools. Having freely received, he freely gave, reserving none for himself, none for hereafter. Let the

morrow take thought for the things of itself, give all to the people that they may eat. It well becomes the men of God to be generous and open-handed, and the fathers of the prophets to be liberal to the sons of the prophets. His servant thought to set so little meat before so many men, was but to tantalize them; but he, in God's name, pronounced it a full meal for them, and so it proved; they did eat, and left thereof, because the bread increased in the eating. God has promised his church, Psa. 132. 15, that he will abundantly bless her provision, and satisfy her poor with bread; whom he feeds, he fills, and what he blesses, comes to much, as what he blows upon, comes to little, Haggai 1.9. Christ's feeding his hearers was a miracle far beyond this, but both teach us that those who wait upon God in the way of duty, may hope to be protected and supplied by particular care of Divine providence.

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1—8. *Naaman's leprosy.*

Our Saviour's miracles were intended for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, yet one, like a crumb, fell from the table to a woman of Canaan; so, this one miracle Elisha wrought for Naaman, a syrian.

Naaman was a great man, he had been very serviceable to his country, God made him so. Though the syrians were idolaters, and oppressors of God's people, yet the deliverance of which Naaman had been the instrument, is here ascribed to the Lord. Such is the correct language of scripture, while those who write common history too evidently show that God is not in all their thoughts. So great was he, so high, so honourable, a mighty man of valour; but he was a leper, which made him a burden to others and to himself. No man's greatness, or honour, or interest, or valour, or victory, can place him out of the reach of the sorest calamities of human life; there is many a sickly crazy body under rich and gay clothing. Every man has some *but* or other in his character, something that blemishes and diminishes him, some allay to his grandeur, some damp to his joy; he may be very happy, very good, yet, in something or other, not so good as he should be, nor so happy as he would be. Naaman was as great as the world could make him, and yet, as bishop Hall re-

marks, the basest slave in Syria would not change skins with him.

A little maid, by birth an israelite, published Elisha's fame, to the honour of Israel, and Israel's God. The unhappy dispersing of the people of God has sometimes proved the happy occasion of the diffusion of the knowledge of God, Acts 8. 4. This little maid, though but a girl, could give an account of the famous prophet the israelites had among them: children should be betimes acquainted with the wondrous works of God, that, wherever they go, they may talk of them. As became a good servant, she desired the health and welfare of her master, though she was a captive, a servant by force; much more should servants by choice seek their master's good; the jews in Babylon were to seek the peace of the land of their captivity, Jer. 29. 7. Elisha had not cleansed any lepers in Israel, Luke 4. 27, yet this little maid, from his other miracles, inferred that he could cure her master, and that he would do it, though he was a syrian. Servants may be blessings to the families where they are, by telling what they know of the glory of God, and the honour of his prophets. Naaman did not despise the intelligence for the sake of her meanness. Though he neither loved nor honoured the jewish nation, yet if one of that nation can cure him of his leprosy, he will thankfully acknowledge the obligation. O that those who are spiritually diseased, would hearken thus readily to the tidings brought them of the great Physician!

Naaman went with a great retinue. He took with him gold, silver, and raiment, to present to his physician; what will men not give for ease, and strength, and soundness of body! He would not go without a letter to the king of Israel from the king his master, who did himself earnestly desire his recovery; he would go to the prophet, supported with the interest of two kings. It would be well if men were as sensible of the burden of sin as they are of bodily disease. But when they seek the blessings which the Lord communicates in answer to the prayers of his faithful people, they will find nothing can be obtained except they come as beggars for a free gift, not as lords to demand or purchase.

Jehoram considered the ignorant language of the king of Syria as blasphemy against God, as well as malicious against

himself, and therefore rent his clothes. It seems that it was deemed impossible to cleanse a rooted leprosy; by this the miracle became more illustrious. Elisha, hearing on what occasion the king had rent his clothes, sent to let him know that if his patient would come to him, he should not lose his labour. It was not for his own honour, but for the honour of God, that he coveted to make them all know that there was a prophet in Israel, though obscure and overlooked.

1. Here is a proof that the leprosy was not peculiar to Israel, as some have ignorantly asserted.

Ver. 9—14. *The cure of Naaman's leprosy.*

Naaman attended at Elisha's door. They that would be cleansed from their spiritual leprosy, must wait at Wisdom's gate, and watch at her doors. Naaman expected to have his compliment returned, but Elisha would not go out to him, lest he should seem pleased with the honour, but sent a messenger. The promise was express, Thou shalt be clean; the method prescribed was plain, Go wash in Jordan: this was not intended as means of the cure; it was merely a sign of the cure, and a trial of his obedience. Elisha sent a messenger to him with these directions. He knew Naaman to be a proud man, and he would let him know, that before the great God all men stand upon the same level. The minister of God should aim to convince men of his desire to do them good, and his indifference about outward distinctions. All God's commands make trial of men's spirits, especially those which direct a sinner how to apply for the blessings of salvation. They accord not with the pride and prejudices of an unhumiliated heart, nor will be attended to without that implicit faith which produces implicit obedience.

Two things disgusted Naaman. 1. That Elisha, as he thought, put a slight upon him, in not coming himself. He had been fancying how this cure would be wrought, and had laid a scheme; but because the thing is not done just so he is wroth. Many have hearts unhumiliated under humbling providences; see Numb. 12. 14. See in Naaman the folly of pride; a cure will not content him, unless he be cured with ceremony, with a great deal of pomp and parade. He scorns to be healed, unless he be humoured. 2. He took it hard that he

must be sent to wash in Jordan, a river of Israel, when he thought Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel. How slightly does he speak of the prophet's directions! He might wash in them, and be clean from dirt, but not wash in them, and be clean from leprosy. He was angry that the prophet bade him wash and be clean; he thinks this too plain, too common a thing for so great a man to be cured by; or he did not believe it would at all effect the cure, and if it would, what medicinal virtue was there in Jordan more than in the rivers of Damascus? But he did not consider that Jordan was the river appointed, and if he expected a cure from the Divine power, he ought to acquiesce in the Divine will.

The way of a sinner's acceptance and sanctification through the blood, and by the Spirit of Christ, through faith alone in his name, does not sufficiently humour or employ self, to please the sinner's heart. Human wisdom thinks it can supply more rational and preferable methods of cleansing. To many laborious devices of superstition seem preferable to the fountain opened for sin, while the proposals of the gospel affront the sons of pride and self-sufficiency. On the other hand, some would hope to be saved, though they refuse self-denial, the mortification of the flesh, or attending to the appointed means of grace; but the sinner, burdened with a sense of guilt, and desirous to flee from the wrath to come, ready to do great things, if required, to obtain forgiveness of sins and eternal life, finding that none of these, in that use of them, can avail, rejoices in the Fountain opened, and will wash and be clean as the Lord appointed.

Naaman turned away from the prophet's door in a rage. They that observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercies, Jonah 2. 8. Proud men are the worst enemies to themselves. His servants drew near, and made bold to reason with him. Masters must be willing to hear reason from their servants, Job 31. 13, 14. As we should be deaf to the counsel of the ungodly, though given by the greatest and most respected names, so we should have our ears open to good advice, though brought by those below us.

The reproof was very modest and respectful; they call him, Father; for servants must honour and obey their masters with a kind of filial affection. In giving

reproof and counsel, we must make it appear that it comes from love and true honour, and that we intend, not reproach, but reformation. They reason, 1. From his earnest desire of a cure; Wouldest thou not do any thing? When diseased sinners are content to do any thing, to submit to any thing, to part with any thing, for a cure, then, and not till then, we begin to indulge some hopes of them. They will take Christ on his own terms, when they are made willing to have Christ upon any terms. 2. From the easiness of the method prescribed; it is but, Wash, and be clean. The methods prescribed for the healing of the leprosy of sin, are so plain, that we are utterly inexcusable if we do not observe them. It is but, Believe, and be saved, Repent, and be pardoned, Wash, and be clean. The cure is effected in the use of the means prescribed. This men get by yielding to the will of God, by attending to his institutions. God will magnify his word above all his name. The believer applies for salvation, not neglecting, altering, or adding to the Saviour's directions; he is thus made clean from guilt and pollution, while others, neglecting his great salvation, live and die in the leprosy of sin.

12. Damascus is situated in a delightful plain, exceedingly well watered by a river, which divides into three branches, so that the principal houses enjoy the luxury of fountains and running streams, which are exceedingly prized in the east.

Ver. 15—19. *Elisha refuses Naaman's gifts.*

Naaman returned and stood before Elisha. He was now truly humbled. Often those who have least to value themselves on are proud and haughty; whereas the most excellent of the earth are the most humble; knowing that they have nothing but what they have received. Naaman, the *leper*, was more proud and dictatorial than when he was *cleansed* of his leprosy.—(11.)

Naaman showed himself convinced of the power of the God of Israel, that he is God alone. A noble confession, that speaks the misery of the gentile world; for the nations that had many gods, really were without God in the world. The mercy of the cure affected him more than the miracle. Those are best able to speak of the power of Divine grace, who themselves experience it. He also shows himself grateful to Elisha the prophet. He valued the cure, not by the easiness

of it to the prophet, but the acceptableness of it to himself, and would gladly recompense accordingly. But Elisha refused, not because he did not need, for he was poor enough, and knew what to do with property; nor because he thought it unlawful, for he received presents from others; he accepted a few loaves from a believing israelite. But it would be for the honour of God, to show this new convert that the servants of the God of Israel looked upon the wealth of this world with a holy contempt. See 1 Cor. 9. 18; 2 Cor. 11. 9.

Naaman will not only offer a sacrifice to the Lord, in thanks for his present cure, but he resolves he will never offer sacrifice to any other. It was a happy cure of his leprosy, which cured him of his idolatry, a more dangerous disease. But he that had spoken very slightly of the waters of Israel, now is in another extreme, and overvalues the earth of Israel, not considering that all the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. He reserved a liberty to bow in the house of Rimmon. He protests his bowing is not, nor ever shall be, as it had been, in honour to the idol, but only in honour to the king, therefore he hopes God will forgive him.

He felt in his own mind that he should not participate in the worship of his master, and yet he felt that his conduct would be open to such a construction. Lest he should cast a stumbling-block before others, he did well in explaining his views and intentions. Elisha saw that Naaman was upright; he knew that where the bowing was not done as an act of dissimulation, nor was likely to be regarded by others as an act of worship, it might be done with a good conscience, more especially as it was accompanied with a public disavowal of all regard for idols. Had Naaman acted from a love to the world, or from a fear of man, his conduct would have been highly criminal, but with his views, and under his circumstances, his conduct was unexceptionable.—(61.)

Or, the whole work was from God, in so extraordinary a manner, that the prophet would not interpose when he had no immediate directions from the Lord. It is not advisable violently to oppose the lesser mistakes which unite with men's first convictions; we cannot bring men forward any faster than the Lord prepares

them to receive instruction. Yet this might not be altogether justifiable. And as to us, 1. If, in covenanting with God, we make a reservation for any known sin, which we will continue to indulge ourselves in, that reservation is a breach of his covenant. We must cast away all our transgressions, and not except any house of Rimmon. 2. Though we are encouraged to pray for the remission of the sins we have committed, yet if we ask for a dispensation to go on in any sin for the future, we mock God, and deceive ourselves. 3. Those that know not how to quit a place at court, when they cannot keep it without sinning against God, and wronging their consciences, do not rightly value Divine favour. 4. Those that truly hate evil, will make conscience of abstaining from all appearances of evil.

We never may do evil that good may come. We never may act contrary to our conscience from any considerations of ease or interest. We never, on any account, may forbear to confess Christ. Nevertheless we are not called to throw up our situations in life because there is some difficulty in filling them aright; we are rather called to approve ourselves to God in those situations, and to fill them to the glory of his name, taking care that we are not led into any sinful compliances to retain our honours or emoluments.—(61.)

18. Some consider that this request of Naaman should be read as to the past, not as to the future, considering that he here besought pardon of his former idolatry.

Ver. 20—27. *Gehazi's covetousness and falsehood: he is smitten with Naaman's leprosy.*

Naaman, a syrian, a courtier, a soldier, had many servants, and we read how wise and good they were. Elisha, a holy prophet, a man of God, has but one servant, and he proves a base liar. He that stood continually before Elisha, to hear his wisdom, had no good impressions made upon him either by his doctrine or miracles—but even Christ himself had a Judas among his followers. The means of grace cannot give grace. The best men, the best ministers, often have those about them, that are their grief and shame.

Gehazi's sin was a complicated sin. The love of money, that root of all evil, was at the bottom of it. Multitudes, by coveting worldly wealth, have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves with many sorrows. He blamed his master for his kindness and generosity to this stran-

ger, though it was for the good of his soul. He told him a deliberate lie, and basely misrepresented his master to Naaman, as one that had repented of his generosity, that would say and unsay. His seeking to conceal what he had unjustly got, added to his sin. He denied it: none looked more observant of his master, though really none were more injurious to him; he thought, as Ephraim, I am become rich, but they shall find no iniquity in me, Hos. 12. 8. His master asked where he had been. One lie commonly leads to another; the way of that sin is down-hill, therefore dare to be true.

Elisha immediately called him to an account; he thought to impose upon the prophet, but was soon given to understand that the Spirit of prophecy could not be deceived, and that it was in vain to lie to the Holy Ghost. Elisha could tell him what he had done, though he had denied it. It is folly to presume upon sin, in hopes of secrecy. When thou goest aside into any by-path, does not thy own conscience go with thee? Does not the eye of God go with thee? He that covers his sin, shall not prosper; particularly, a lying tongue is but for a moment, Prov. 12. 19. The Spirit of God showed Elisha the transaction as plainly as if he had been present. Elisha also could tell Gehazi the thoughts and intents of his heart; he was projecting, now that he had got these two talents, to purchase ground and cattle, and to leave Elisha's service. All the foolish hopes and contrivances of carnal worldlings are open before God. He tells him also the evil of it. Is this an opportunity of enriching thyself? Couldst thou not find a better way of getting money, than by belying thy master, and laying a stumbling-block before a young convert? Those that are for getting wealth at any time, and by any ways and means whatsoever, right or wrong, lay themselves open to temptation. It is not a time to increase our wealth, when we can only do it in such ways as are dishonourable to God and religion, or injurious to others.

Gehazi was punished. If he will have Naaman's money, he shall have his disease with it. The sentence was immediately executed; he went out from Elisha's presence a leper white as snow. Thus he is stigmatized, and carries the mark of his shame wherever he goes: he loads himself and family with a curse, which shall

for ever perpetuate the remembrance of his villany. The getting of treasures by a lying tongue, is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death, Prov. 21. 6. Those who get wealth by fraud and injustice, cannot expect either the comfort or the continuance of it. What was Gehazi profited, though he gained two talents, when thereby he lost his health, his honour, his peace, his service, and, if repentance prevented not, his soul for ever? See Job 20. 12, &c. Let us beware of hypocrisy and covetousness, and dread, above all things, the curse of spiritual leprosy remaining upon our souls living, dying, and for ever.

CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1—7. *The sons of the prophets enlarge their habitations—Iron made to swim.*

God has often increased his church by the addition of many faithful ministers and true believers in times of great persecution. Religion indeed always appears to advantage under the cross. The college or school here spoken of, seems to be that at Gilgal, for there Elisha was, ch. 4. 38, and it was near Jordan. Elisha's miracles, doubtless, drew many; perhaps they increased the more when Gehazi was removed. It should seem by the instance, ch. 4. 43, that Naaman's case was not the only one in which he grudged his master's generosity.

The sons of the prophets were humble men, and did not seek that which was great. When straitened for room, they did not depend on others to prepare them a more convenient or spacious residence. But they would not go to hew timber without Elisha's company to solace their toil by his edifying conversation. There is that pleasantness in the converse of eminent servants of God, which can make those who listen to them forget the pain and the weariness of labour. And even the sons of the prophets must not be so taken up with contemplation, as to render themselves unfit for action; and they must not indulge themselves so as to be averse to labour. Let no man think an honest employment either a burden or a disparagement.

These were honest men, who cared to give all men their own. When an axe-head, used by one of them, fell into the water, he did not say, It was a mischance, and who can help it? It was the fault of the

helve. Had the axe been his own, it would have troubled him that he could not be further serviceable to his brethren; but now, beside that, it troubles him that he cannot be just to the owner. We ought to be careful of that which is borrowed, as of our own, because we must do as we would be done by. It is likely, this prophet was poor, and had not wherewithal to pay for the axe, which made the loss so much the greater trouble. To those who have an honest mind, the sorest grievance of poverty is, not so much their own want and disgrace, as being rendered unable to pay just debts.

In so small a matter the Lord was pleased to work a miracle, to compose the man's mind to honour Elisha, to enable them to proceed with their work, and to encourage faith and hope. The Lord cares for his people in their most minute concerns. The stick cast into the water was a token of the Lord's miraculous working, and it is as useless as needless to inquire which way he made the iron to swim. God's grace can thus raise the stony, iron heart, which is sunk into the mud of this world, and raise up affections, naturally earthly, to things above.

Ver. 8—12. *Elisha discloses the counsels of the king of Syria.*

The enemies of God's Israel are politic in their devices, and restless in their attempts against him. But all those devices are known to God, even those that are deepest laid. He knows not only what men do, but what they design, and has many ways of counteracting them. And it is a great advantage to us, to be warned of our danger, that we may stand upon our guard against it. The king of Israel would regard the warnings Elisha gave him of danger from the Syrians, but not the warnings of his danger from his sins. Such warnings are little heeded by most; they would save themselves from death, but will not from hell! Here, a confession of the boundless knowledge, as before, of the boundless power of Israel's God, is extorted from Syrians. Nothing that is done, said, or thought, by any person, in any place, at any time, is out of the reach of God's cognizance.

Ver. 13—23. *The Syrians sent to seize Elisha are made prisoners themselves.*

By a great force the king of Syria hoped to make sure of Elisha, especially coming upon him by surprise. Foolish

man ! did he believe that Elisha had informed the king of Israel of his secret counsels ? If he did, could he be so weak as to imagine that he would not discover the designs laid against himself ? And that, having interest enough in Heaven to discover them, he would not have interest enough to defeat them ? Those that fight against God, his people, and prophets, know not what they do.

Observe the consternation of Elisha's servant, and how his master quieted him. What he said to him is spoken to all the faithful servants of God, when without are fightings, and within are fears. Fear not, with that fear which has torment and amazement, for they that are with us, to protect us, are more than they that are against us, to destroy us ; angels, unspeakably more numerous ; God, infinitely more powerful. Good men desire, not only to be easy themselves, but to have those about them easy. They, whose faith is strong, ought to consider and compassionate those who are weak, and of a timorous spirit, and to do what they can to strengthen their hands. The power engaged for Elisha's protection, could both terrify and consume. For the satisfaction of his servant, there needed no more than the opening of his eyes ; that therefore he prayed for, and obtained. The eyes of his body were open, and with them he saw the danger. Lord, open the eyes of our faith, that with them we may see the protection we are under. The greatest kindness we can do for those that are fearful and faint-hearted, is, to pray for them, and so to recommend them to the mighty grace of God. The opening our eyes will silence our fears : in the dark we are most apt to be frightened ; the clearer sight we have of the sovereignty and power of Heaven, the less we shall fear the calamities of earth.

Were our eyes opened to behold the world of spirits, we should perceive malicious, powerful, and crafty spirits combined for our destruction ; but we should also see holy angels encamped around us for our defence, and the Almighty God himself, our Friend and Protector. Strong faith in vigorous exercise will supply the want of sight ; it realizes both the danger and the security. May God give us this faith, and especially strengthen it in the time of danger, and the hour of death.

Elisha prayed to God to smite the host

of syrians with blindness ; immediately their sight was so altered, that they could not know persons and places they were before acquainted with. See the power of God over the minds and understandings of men ; he enlightened the eyes of Elisha's friend, and darkened the eyes of his foes, that they might see indeed, but not perceive, Isa. 6. 9. For this twofold judgment Christ came into this world, that they which see not, might see, and that they which see might be made blind, John 9. 39, a savour of life to some, of death to others.

When the syrians were thus bewildered and confounded, Elisha led them to Samaria. He did not lie to them, for if they would see him, they must go to another city to which he would direct them. When he had brought them to Samaria, he prayed to God to open their eyes ; and, behold, to their great terror, they were in the midst of Samaria, where there was a force sufficient to make them prisoners. Satan, the god of this world, blinds men's eyes, and so deludes them into their own ruin ; but when God enlightens their eyes, they see themselves in the midst of their enemies, captives to Satan, and in danger of hell, though, before, they thought their condition good. The enemies of God and his church, when they fancy themselves ready to triumph, will find themselves conquered and triumphed over.

When Elisha had the syrians at his mercy, he made it appear that he was influenced by Divine goodness as well as Divine power. He took care to protect them from the danger into which he had brought them. They were God's prisoners—they that humble themselves under God's hand, take the best course to secure themselves. He directed the king to treat them handsomely, and dismiss them fairly. The great duty of loving enemies, and doing good to those that hate us, was commanded, in the Old Testament, Prov. 25. 21, 22, If thine enemy hunger, feed him, Exod. 23. 4, 5, and was practised here by Elisha. Elijah had given a specimen of Divine justice, when he called for fire to consume his persecutors ; Elisha gave a specimen of Divine mercy, heaping coals of fire on the heads of his persecutors to soften them. Let us not be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. The syrians came no more ; they saw it

was to no purpose to attempt an assault on so great and good a man.

18. The word means, dazzlings, deceptions, or confusion of sight. It is only used here and in Gen. 19. 11.

Ver. 24—33. *Samaria besieged—A famine in the city—A woman eateth her own child—The king sends to slay Elisha.*

The syrians soon forgot the kindnesses they had lately received. The country, we may suppose, was plundered and laid waste, when the capital city of Samaria was brought to the last extremity. So great was the scarcity, that an ass's head was sold for a considerable price. Learn to value plenty, and to be thankful for it; see how contemptible money is, when in time of famine, it is so freely parted with for any thing that is eatable!

The language of Jehoram to the woman may be the language of desperation. He laments the emptiness of the floor and the wine-press. However, though he cannot help her, he is willing to hear her, What ails thee? Is there any thing singular in thy case? Yes; she and another had agreed that they should boil and eat her son first, and then her neighbour's; hers was eaten, who can think of it without horror! and now her neighbour hid her own. See an instance of the dominion which the flesh has got above the spirit, when the most natural affections of the mind may be thus overpowered by the natural appetites of the body. See the word of God fulfilled; among the threatenings of God's judgments upon Israel for their sins, this was one, Deut. 28. 53—57, that they should eat the flesh of their own children, which one would think incredible, yet it came to pass. The truth and the awful justice of God were displayed in this most horrible transaction. Alas! what miseries hath sin brought upon the world!

The king lamented the calamity as one heartily concerned for the misery of his people; but he laments not his own iniquity, nor the iniquity of his people, which were the procuring causes of the calamity. The foolishness of man perverts his way, and then his heart frets against the Lord. He swears the death of Elisha! Elisha sat in his house well composed, and the elders with him well employed, no doubt, while the king was like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. The same spirit of prophecy that enabled Elisha to tell what was done at a distance, authorized

him to call the king the son of a murderer. At his desire the messenger of Jehoram was shut out, till his master, who followed him, perhaps, to countermand his order, was arrived. The king, who seems to have been in a struggle between his convictions and his corruptions, abandons himself to despair; This evil is of the Lord. It is a general truth, that all penal evil is of the Lord, as the First Cause and Sovereign Judge, Amos 3. 6; and this we ought to apply to particular cases; if all evil, then this evil, whatever it is we are now groaning under, whoever are the instruments. But his inference from this truth was foolish and wicked, What should I wait for the Lord any longer? When Eli, and David, and Job said, It is of the Lord, they became patient; but this bad man grew outrageous. It is unreasonable to be weary of waiting for God, for he is a God of judgment, and blessed are all they that wait for him.

Wicked men will blame any one as the cause of their calamities, rather than condemn themselves, and renounce their sins. If rending the clothes without a broken and contrite heart would avail, if wearing sackcloth without being renewed in the spirit of their mind would serve, they would not stand out against the Lord. But their own impenitence retards their deliverance, and they would excuse proceeding to desperate measures by pretending it was vain to wait for the Lord. May the whole word of God increase in us reverent fear and holy hope, that we may be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing our labour is not in vain in the Lord.

25. Various interpretations have been given of this verse. One of the most probable is that which takes the hebrew word, not for an ass's head, but for a pile of bread, or some such article of food. The other expression denotes a kind of pulse or vetches, now called by the arabs pigeons' dung.—*Carpenter*. If the pieces of silver were drachms, the largest amount would be about 2*l*. 9*s*. the smallest about 3*s*.—*Greenfield*.

33. This chapter is unhappily divided from the next, as by the present division the story is unnaturally interrupted.—*A. Clarke*.

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1, 2. *Elisha prophesies plenty in Samaria on the morrow.*

Man's extremity is God's opportunity of magnifying his own power; his time to appear for his people is when their

strength is gone, Deut. 32. 36. When they had given over expecting help, it came; When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth? Luke 18. 8. The king said, What should I wait for the Lord any longer? And perhaps some of the elders were ready to say the same. Well, said Elisha, now hear ye the word of the Lord, hear it and heed it, hear it and believe it; to-morrow corn shall be sold at the usual rate in the gate of Samaria. That is, the siege shall be raised, for the gate of the city shall be opened, and the market shall be held there as formerly; the return of peace is thus expressed, Judg. 5. 11. A peer of Israel openly declared his disbelief of this prediction. The just doom passed upon him for his infidelity was, that he should see this great plenty for his conviction, yet not eat of it to his comfort. Unbelief is a sin by which men greatly dishonour and displease God, and deprive themselves of the favours he designed for them; the murmuring israelites saw Canaan, but could not enter in because of unbelief: such will be the portion of those that believe not the promise of eternal life; they shall see it at a distance, but shall never taste of it. They forfeit the benefit of the promise, if they cannot take God's word. The prices here specified were those of plenty, and that corn should be sold so cheap on the morrow was impossible to any power but that of God. But no temporal deliverances and mercies will in the end profit sinners, unless they are led to repentance by the goodness of God.

1. A seah of flour. The seah contained about two gallons and a half. The shekel was about 2s. 4d.

Ver. 3—11. *Tidings brought by lepers that the syrian army had fled.*

The siege of Samaria was raised by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts, striking terror upon the spirits of the besiegers. The syrians that besieged Dothan had their sight affected, ch. 6. 18; these had their hearing affected, for God knows how to work upon every sense, pursuant to his own counsels, Exod. 4. 11. It was from God, who both brings the wind out of his treasures, and forms the spirit of man within him. The sight of horses and chariots encouraged the prophet's servant; the noise of horses and chariots terrified the hosts of Syria; for notices from the invisible world are very com-

fortable, or very dreadful, accordingly as men are at peace with God, or at war with him. We all absolutely depend upon the Lord for the due exercise of our senses and faculties, as well as for the continuance of our lives and the salvation of our souls. The syrians concluded the king of Israel had procured assistance from some foreign power; there were they in great fear, where no fear was. They all fled with precipitation, as for their lives; left their camp as it was, even the horses that might have hastened their flight, they could not stay to take with them. God can, when he pleases, dispirit the boldest and most brave, and make the stoutest heart to tremble; as for them that will not fear God, he can make them fear at the shaking of a leaf.

Samaria is delivered, and does not know it. The watchmen on the walls were not aware of the retreat of the enemy, but Providence employs four lepers to be the intelligencers, who had their lodging without the gate, being excluded the city, as ceremonially unclean. The jews say they were Gehazi and his sons; perhaps Gehazi might be one, which might make him be noticed afterward by the king, ch. 8. 4. While the weightier matters of the law were neglected, the exclusion of lepers was rigorously observed. These lepers were ready to perish; they therefore determine to go to the enemy, and throw themselves upon their mercy: yet men, in the concerns of their souls, will not put themselves to inconveniences to escape the wrath to come. Common prudence will put us upon that method which may mend our condition, but cannot make it worse. Believers venture themselves into the Saviour's hands, and cleave to him with purpose of heart, while others neglect or forsake him.

Providence ordered it, that these lepers came as soon as the syrians were fled. They feasted in the first tent they came to, and began to think of enriching themselves with plunder: but their consciences told them that mischief would befall them, if they sought themselves only. Natural humanity and fear of punishment are powerful checks upon the selfishness of the ungodly. These feelings tend to preserve regularity in the world; but they who have found the unsearchable riches of Christ, will not long delay to report the good tidings to others. From

love to him, not from selfish feelings, they will gladly communicate their temporal good things with their brethren.

Ver. 12—20. *Samaria plentifully supplied—Death of the unbelieving lord.*

The king knew he had no reason to expect that God should appear thus wonderfully for him, having forfeited his favour by his unbelief and impatience. Let not those who, like him, are unstable in all their ways, think to receive any thing from God; nay, a guilty conscience fears the worst, and makes men suspicious. They sent out to see what was become of the Syrians. He that gave this advice, seems very sensible of the deplorable condition the people were in; for, speaking of the horses, many of which were dead, and the rest ready to perish for hunger, he says, They are as all the multitude of Israel. Here see the wants of Israel supplied in a way they little thought of, which should encourage us to depend upon the power and goodness of God in our greatest straits. The word of Elisha was fulfilled; they that spoiled the camp, had not only enough to supply themselves with, but an overplus to sell for the benefit of others. God's promise may be safely relied on, for no word of his shall fall to the ground.

The nobleman that questioned the truth of Elisha's word, found that Divine threatenings will as surely be accomplished as Divine promises. He that believeth not shall be damned, stands as firm as, He that believeth shall be saved. This lord was preferred by the king to the charge of the gate, to see that there was no tumult or disorder. He was trodden to death by the people in the gate, the crowd being exceeding great. God's justice was glorified, and the word of Elisha was fulfilled; he saw the plenty, to silence and shame his unbelief, corn cheap without opening windows in heaven, and therein saw his own folly in prescribing to God; but he did not eat of the plenty he saw. Justly are those thus tantalized with the world's promises, who think themselves tantalized with the promises of God.

The event is particularly compared with the prediction, and we may learn, 1. How deeply God resents distrust of his power, providence, and promise. When Israel said, Can God furnish a table? the Lord heard it, and was wroth. God never promises the end, without knowing where to

provide the means. 2. How uncertain life is, and the enjoyments of it! honour and power cannot secure men from sudden and inglorious deaths. 3. How certain God's threatenings are, and how sure to alight on the guilty. Every word of God will shortly be accomplished, and earthly honours but hasten the ruin of the ungodly. Unbelief suggests endless and unreasonable suspicions, and puts away the blessings brought nigh to the soul in the promises and invitations of God's word. The believer, on the other hand, makes trial of them, experience confirms his faith; and a happy change in his state and character takes place from the time he seeks blessings in the way the Lord has prescribed. May God help us to inquire whether we are exposed to his threatenings, or interested in his promises.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ver. 1—6. *A famine in Israel—The shunammite sojourns in the land of the philistines—She returns, and obtains her land again.*

Temporal deliverances are only respites to the ungodly. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee, is a warning of general application. This famine in the latter part of Jehoram's reign was a punishment of the obstinate idolatry of both king and people, notwithstanding the miracles they had witnessed, and the mercies they had experienced.

The kindness of the good shunammite to Elisha was rewarded by the care taken of her in famine. She had notice of this famine before it came, and was directed to remove to some other country. It is happiness to foresee an evil, and wisdom, when we foresee it, to hide ourselves. Providence gave her a settlement in the land of the philistines; it seems the famine was peculiar to the land of Israel. The sins of Israel were more provoking to God than the sins of their neighbours, because of their profession of relation to God; You only have I known, therefore will I punish you, Amos 3. 2. When the famine was over, she returned out of the land of the philistines; that was no proper place for an israelite any longer than there was necessity for it. At her return she found herself kept out of the possession of her own estates. Hard is it to find a person in whom one can put confidence in a time of trouble, Prov. 25. 19; Mic. 7. 5. Time was when she dwelt so securely among her own people, that

she had no occasion to be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host, ch. 4. 13; but now she was glad to appeal to the king; such uncertainty there is in this life; that may fail us which we most depend upon, and that befriend us which we think we shall never need. She found the king talking with Gehazi about Elisha's miracles. Providence is to be acknowledged in the circumstances of events; sometimes those minute in themselves prove of great consequence, as here; for they made the king ready to believe Gehazi's narrative, when thus confirmed by the persons most nearly concerned. It made him ready to grant her request, and to support a life which was given once and again by miracle. The king gave orders that her land should be restored, and all the profits made in her absence. It is not enough for those in authority that they do no wrong themselves, they must support the right of those who are wronged.

Ver. 7—15. *Elisha consulted by Benhadad, king of Syria—Hazeel killeth Benhadad.*

The prophet doubtless was directed of God to go to the heathen city of Damascus. Benhadad, a great king, rich and mighty, lay sick. No honour, wealth, or power will secure men from the common diseases and disasters of human life. Now that he is sick, he distrusts his idol, and sends to inquire of the God of Israel. Among other changes of men's minds by sickness and affliction, this is one, that it often gives other thoughts of God's ministers, and teaches to value the counsels and prayers of those whom they had hated and despised.

To put honour upon the prophet, the king sends to him by Hazeel, his chief minister, and sends him a noble present. We may infer that the prophet accepted this, as the provision the Lord assigned him in a foreign country. He inquired of Elisha, Shall I recover? We desire to know things to come in time, while things to come in eternity are little thought of. Elisha answered that the king might recover, the disease was not mortal, but that he should die another way, not a natural, but a violent death; while men think to avoid one, they fall by another. He looked Hazeel in the face with unusual concern. It was not in Hazeel's countenance, that Elisha read what he would do, but God, at this time, revealed it to him, and it fetched tears from his

eyes: the more foresight men have, the more grief they are liable to. When Hazeel asked why he wept, he told him what mischief he would do to the Israel of God. See what havoc war makes, what havoc sin makes, and how the nature of man is changed by the fall, and stripped even of humanity itself. Hazeel wonders that the prophet should suppose him capable of such brutal ferocity and cruelty. See here what a bad opinion he had of the sin; he looked upon it to be great wickedness, more likely for a brute, for a beast of prey, to do than a man. It is possible for a wicked man, under the convictions and restraints of natural conscience, to express great abhorrence of a sin, yet afterwards to be reconciled to it. He thought it impossible he should do such things. We are apt to think ourselves sufficiently armed against the sins we are afterward overcome by, as Peter, Matt. 26. 35. In answer to this, Elisha only told him he should be king over Syria; then he would have power to do it, and then he would find in his heart to do it. Those that are little and low in the world, cannot imagine how strong the temptations of power and prosperity are, which, if ever they arrive at, they will find how deceitful their hearts are, how much worse than they suspected.

Set but hypocrisy upon the stage of power and greatness, and it will not be long before its mask falls off. The prophet meant thus much when he made his reply to Hazeel's seeming abhorrence of what he had foretold concerning him. As if he had said, Hazeel, thou never yet didst sit in a king's chair, and knowest not what a discovery that will make of a deceitful heart.—(28.)

Hazeel gave a false account of Elisha's answer. The intimation was not the cause of the crime, and no excuse for it. Had he resembled David, he would have waited in the path of duty till the Lord performed his word in the manner that pleased him.

The devil ruins men, by saying they shall certainly recover and do well, so rocking them asleep in security, than which nothing is more fatal. This was an injury to the king, who lost the benefit of this warning to prepare for death, and an injury to Elisha, who would be counted a false prophet. Hazeel, who was Benhadad's confidant, becomes his murderer; some think he was not suspected, nor did it come out but by this inspired historian.

Ver. 16—24. *Jehoram's wicked reign in Judah.*

A general idea is given of Jehoram's badness. He did as the house of Ahab, and worse he could not do; his character is taken from the bad example he followed. No mistake is more fatal to young people, than a mistake in the choice of those from whom they would take their measures, whose good opinion they value themselves by. Jehoram chose the house of Ahab for his pattern rather than his father's house, and it was his ruin. We have particulars of his wickedness, 2 Chron. 21. every thing that was bad. His father, no doubt, had him taught the good knowledge of the Lord, but he did ill to marry him to the daughter of Ahab; no good could come of an alliance with an idolatrous family, but all mischief with such a daughter of such a mother. He did not do well to make him king in his own lifetime. It is said here, He began to reign, Jehoshaphat being then king; hereby his father gratified his pride, than which nothing is more pernicious to young people, indulged him in his ambition, and so brought a curse upon his own family, as Eli did, whose sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.

The edomites revolted, who had been under the government of Judah about 150 years. Jehoram tried to reduce them, but could not recover dominion over them. The edomites were, after this, bitter enemies to the jews, as appears by the prophecy of Obadiah, and Psa. 137. 7. Now Isaac's prophecy was fulfilled, Gen. 27. 40. Libnah revolted, that was a city in Judah. Jehoram's reign was short; God cut him off when he was but forty years old, and had reigned but eight years. Jehoram died of sore diseases, and died without being regretted.

Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah; he could easily have done it, he might justly have done it, it would have been no loss to him to have done it; yet he would not do it for David's sake. Not for the sake of any merit of his which could challenge this favour to his family as a debt, but for the sake of the promise made to him, that he should have a lamp, that is, a succession of kings from one generation to another; by which his name should be kept as a lamp is kept burning by a constant supply of oil. His family was not to be extinct, till it terminated in the Messiah, that Son of David, on whom was to be all the glory of his Father's house, and

in whose everlasting kingdom that promise to David is fulfilled, Psa. 132. 17, I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed. While wicked men, from generation to generation, perish in their sins, the Son of David, the Light of his church, ever liveth to protect, bless, and comfort his people.

(See 2 Chron. 21.)

Ver. 25—29. *Ahaziah's wicked reign in Judah.*

Ahaziah looks mean in the history; and, because wicked, he was vile in God's account. It is evidence of the affinity between Jehoshaphat and Ahab, that they had the same names in their families at the same time. Ahab had two sons, Ahaziah and Jehoram, who reigned successively. Jehoshaphat had a son and grandson named Jehoram and Ahaziah, who, in like manner, reigned successively. Names do not make natures, but it was bad for Jehoshaphat's family to borrow names from Ahab's; or if he lent names to that wretched family, he could not communicate their significations; Ahaziah means, Taking hold of the Lord; and Jehoram, or Joram, The Lord exalted.

Ahaziah king of Israel reigned but two years; Ahaziah king of Judah but one. His relation to Ahab's family was the occasion of his wickedness and of his fall. When men choose wives for themselves, let them remember they are choosing mothers for their children. Joram, his mother's brother, persuaded him to join for the recovery of Ramoth-gilead, an attempt fatal to Ahab; so it was to Joram his son. Ahaziah went to Jezreel to see Joram. Providence so ordered it, that he might be cut off with the house of Ahab, when the measure of their iniquity was full. Those who partake with sinners in their sin, must expect to partake with them in their plagues. May all the changes, troubles, and wickedness of the world make us more earnest to obtain an interest in the salvation of Christ.

(See 2 Chron. 22.)

CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 1—10. *Elisha sends a young prophet to anoint Jehu king of Israel.*

This service of going to Ramoth-gilead and anointing Jehu, a commander in the army there, was dangerous, and required labour. Let youth work. Yet it was an honourable service; and, for the encouragement of the young prophets, Elisha employed one of them. It was not the

constant practice to anoint kings, but upon the disturbance of the succession, as in the case of Solomon; or the interruption of it, as in the case of Joash, ch. 11. 12; or the translation of the government to a new family, as here. He was ordered to do it privately, and to do it expeditiously. It becomes the sons of the prophets to be quick and lively at their work, as men that hate sauntering and trifling. With the confidence that became a messenger from God, he called Jehu out from the rest.

In many of these events we must acknowledge the secret operation of God, disposing men to accomplish his purposes respecting them. Jehu was anointed king over Israel by the Lord's special choice, and not in the ordinary course of his providence. The Lord still had a remnant of his people, and would yet preserve his worship among them. Of this Jehu was reminded. He was commanded to destroy the house of Ahab, and, as far as he acted in obedience to God and upon right principles, he needed not regard reproach or opposition. The murder of God's prophets is here strongly noticed. Jehoram had been spared many years, but continued impenitent. Jezebel had retained her authority; she persisted in her idolatry and her enmity to Jehovah and his servants, and her iniquity was now full. God's special commission justifies the severest execution of his enemies; but our general instructions to do good and to bless, and to overcome evil with good, point out a more delightful service in which we should daily abound.

Ver. 11—15. *Jehu communicates with the captains.*

The captains speak of the young prophet with contempt. Reference might be made in this expression to the vehement actions sometimes used by the prophets; but it rather resulted from contempt of religion and its ministers. Without excepting Him who spake as never man spake, they who faithfully deliver the Lord's message to sinners, have in all ages been treated as madmen. Their judgment, conversation, maxims, and conduct are so contrary to those of other men—they endure so much in pursuit of objects, and are so influenced by motives, into which the others cannot enter. But above all, the charge is brought by the worldly and ungodly of all descriptions, who are mad indeed; while the principles

and practice of the devoted servants of God prove to be wise and reasonable. Jehu, in his answer, spoke with boldness, which seems to have risen from Divine energy on his mind; for if the captains had not taken part with him, the discovery would have been fatal. Some kind of faith in the word of God by the prophet, seems to have animated him to this hazardous undertaking, of which he does not seem to have had any previous intention. Their minds also were surprisingly disposed to agree with him.

13. The entrance to ancient fortresses usually was by a high narrow staircase, exposed to view, that assailants might not be able to make use of it. Some such stairs appear to be here meant. The place is called a house, ver. 6; probably it was a tower, in which form the early fortresses were for the most part constructed.

Ver. 16—29. *Joram king of Israel, and Ahaziah king of Judah, slain by Jehu.*

From Ramoth-gilead to Jezreel, Jehu marched with expedition, and took the utmost precaution to prevent the tidings from getting to Jezreel before him. Joram's watchman discovered him first at a distance. The king sent first one messenger and then another to bring him intelligence. Each had the same answer, that is, Thou art not interested in the event. If thou wouldest be safe, turn behind and join my company. Jehu was a man of eager spirit. The wisdom of God is seen in the choice of instruments to be employed in his work. But it is not for any man's reputation to be known by his fury. He that has rule over his own spirit, is better than the mighty.

Joram himself goes out to meet Jehu, and takes Ahaziah king of Judah along with him. How strangely has Providence sometimes ordered it, that men have hastened to meet their ruin, when their day has come to fall! Joram met Jehu in the portion of Naboth. The circumstances of events are sometimes so ordered by Divine Providence, as to make the punishment answer to the sin, as face answers to face in a glass. Joram's demand was still the same, Is it peace, Jehu? Is all well? Dost thou come home thus, flying from the Syrians, or a conqueror over them? It is very common for great sinners, even when upon the brink of ruin, to flatter themselves that all is well with them, and to cry peace to themselves. Jehu's reply was very startling. Sinners will not always be flattered, Psal. 36. 2. Jehu charges

upon him his mother's wickedness, because he had at first learned it, and then with his kingly power protected it. He throws him off from all pretensions to peace; What peace can come to the house in which there is so much wickedness unrepented? The way of sin can never be the way of peace, Isa. 57. 21. What peace can sinners have with God, what peace with their own consciences, what good, what comfort can they expect in life, in death, or after death, who go on still in their trespasses? No peace so long as sin is persisted in; but as soon as it is repented of and forsaken, there is peace. When Joram heard of his mother's crimes, his heart failed; he concluded the long threatened day of reckoning was come.

Joram king of Israel was slain presently. He died a criminal, under the sentence of the law, which Jehu, the executioner, pursued in the disposal of the dead body. Naboth's vineyard was hard by, which put him in mind of the doom Elijah passed upon Ahab; and on that very piece of ground of which he had made himself master, at the expense of the guilt of innocent blood, his son's dead body lay exposed a spectacle to the world. Thus the Lord is known by the judgment he executeth. Here the dogs, in some sense, licked the blood of Ahab as flowing from the wounds of his son: see 2 Chron. 22. Ahaziah king of Judah was pursued, and slain. He had not been slain, but that he was joined with the house of Ahab both in affinity and in iniquity. He was one of them; so he had made himself by his sins. It is dangerous to associate with evil-doers; we may be entangled both in guilt and misery by it.

22. Idolatry is in scripture called whoredom, and adulteries, when committed by God's professed people, to denote the Lord's abhorrence of it. Jezebel's idolatries had been manifold and long-continued, and doubtless attended by the shameless practices used in idol-worship.—*Scott.*

Ver. 30—37. *Jezebel eaten by dogs.*

The greatest delinquent in the house of Ahab was Jezebel; she introduced Baal, slew the Lord's prophets, contrived the murder of Naboth, stirred up her husband first, and then her sons, to do wickedly. Her reign had lasted during three reigns, but now, at length, her day is come to fall. Jezebel's destruction may be looked upon as typical of the destruction of idolaters and persecutors.

Instead of hiding herself, as one afraid of Divine vengeance, Jezebel exposed herself to it, mocked at fear, and was not affrighted. See how a heart, hardened against God, will brave it out to the last, Job 15. 26. But never did any thus harden their hearts against him, and prosper. Instead of humbling herself, and putting herself into mourning, she painted her face, and tired her head, that she might appear, as she thought, great and majestic. There is not a surer presage of ruin than an unhumiliated heart under humbling providences. Let painted faces look in Jezebel's glass, and see how they like themselves. Let them contemplate Jezebel's conduct and fate, especially they who use such arts to induce others to commit wickedness, and to draw them aside from the ways of truth and righteousness. Instead of trembling before Jehu, the instrument of God's vengeance, she thinks to make him tremble with that threatening question, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master? Observe, she took no notice of the hand of God gone out against her family. We are very apt to break out into passion against the instruments of our trouble, when we ought to submit to God, and be angry at ourselves only. It is no new thing for those that are doing God's work, to be looked upon as out of the way of peace. Active reformers, faithful reprovers, are threatened with trouble; but let them be in nothing terrified, Phil. 1. 28. Had the case been parallel, it had been proper; for the judgments of God on those that have gone before us in any sinful way, should be warnings to us to take heed of treading in their steps. But Zimri was incited merely by his own ambition and cruelty; whereas Jehu did this by order from Heaven. In comparing persons and things, we must carefully distinguish, and take heed, lest from the fate of sinful men we read the doom of useful men.

Jehu demanded aid against Jezebel. When reformation-work is on foot, it is time to ask, Who sides with it? Her attendants delivered her up. Thus she was put to death. See the end of pride and cruelty, and say, The Lord is righteous. The dogs completed her shame and destruction, according to the prophecy. Though Jehu had forgotten what the prophet said, God had not forgotten it. The dogs devoured her dead body,

the dogs that went about the city, *Psa.* 59. 6, and fed upon the carrion, there was nothing left but her bare skull, (the painted face was gone,) and her feet and hands. When we pamper our bodies, let us think how vile they are; shortly they will be a feast for worms under ground, or beasts above ground. When notice was brought of this, Jehu remembered the threatening, *1 Kings* 21. 23. Jezebel's name no where remained, but as stigmatized in sacred writ. May we all flee from that wrath which is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; and seek an interest in those precious promises which will be performed in due season.

30. The original words are, "She adjusted or set off her eyes with the powder of lead ore." See the marginal reading. This process is performed by dipping a bodkin into the powder, and drawing it between the eye and the eye-lid. The colouring or tinge hereby given to the eyes is thought to set off the complexion, and add much to beauty, and it is still customary in some eastern countries. The women also paint their faces with colours.

36. In eastern cities there generally are many dogs without masters; these prowl about in companies, and greedily devour any carcasses or offal which they find in the street. When Bruce was at Gondar, his dogs more than once brought into his court-yard mangled remains of human bodies, which had been put to death by the public executioner, and left unburied in the streets.

CHAPTER X.

Ver. 1—14. *Ahab's sons and Ahaziah's brethren put to death.*

How soon are the most flourishing families and kingdoms desolated when the Lord ariseth to execute his judgments on sinners! They who bequeath the blessing of God to their children, do better for them than they who leave large estates, burdened with the Divine indignation. Ahab's descendants by several wives, including the sons of Jehoram, resided at Samaria. These elders had been wickedly obsequious to Jezebel's orders; and the same base spirit makes them as ready to obey Jehu's orders. Let none aim at arbitrary power, lest they be found rolling a stone which will return upon them.

Jehu sought to abate the odium of his own conduct towards Ahab, by contrasting it with the treachery of these professed friends; and he would have the people observe that the whole was a performance of the word of the Lord by Elijah, which would be exactly fulfilled. In the most awful transactions, though attended by

the basest villanies of man, the truth and justice of God are to be noticed; and he never did nor can command any thing unjust or unreasonable.

Jehu destroyed all that remained of the house of Ahab; all the officers of his household, ministers of state, all who had been partners in his wickedness, and his priests, whom he employed in his idolatrous services. Having done this in Jezreel, he did the same in Samaria. The brethren of Ahaziah coming in his way, he slew them likewise. The brethren of Ahaziah were slain by the arabs, *2 Chron.* 22. 1; but these were the sons of his brethren, as there explained. They were branches of Ahab's house, being descended from Athaliah. They were going to make court to the princes of the house of Ahab, which showed they were linked to them in affection as well as in affinity. The Lord is known by these judgments which he executeth.

When we look back upon our deceased relatives, and forward to our own death; when we reflect on the sufferings and miseries of the human race; when we consider the innumerable millions of human bodies committed to the dust, and the vast numbers daily following; when we look forward to the resurrection and final judgment, and think upon the immense numbers of the wicked attending their awful sentence of everlasting fire; when the whole sum of death and misery has been considered, and the question occurs, "Who slew all these?" The answer is, "SIN;" transgressions of God's law has made this havoc, and brought all this misery into his most perfect creation; but worse than all this, sin hath crucified the Lord of glory. Shall we then harbour sin in our bosoms, and seek for happiness from the cause of all misery?

1. The greek version reads, To the elders of Samaria, which probably is the right reading. "Sons" often is used to include grandsons and lineal descendants.

8. The heads of criminals are frequently piled in heaps at the palace-gates in Turkey and Persia at the present day.

Ver. 15—28. *Jehu, accompanied by Jehonadab, destroyeth the worshippers of Baal.*

Jehonadab, though no prophet, priest, or levite, no prince or ruler, was eminent for prudence and piety; and generally respected for that life of self-denial and devotion which he lived. Jehu, though a soldier, knew him, honoured him, and showed him the good-will due to so great

an example of serious godliness. Jehonadab assured him that he was a hearty well-wisher to his cause. Jehu desired to know whether he had the same affection for him, Is thine heart right? A question we should often put to ourselves: I make a plausible profession, have gained a reputation among men, but, is my heart right? Am I sincere with God; Jehonadab owned him in the work, both of revenge and of reformation.

All good people would think the better of Jehu, when they saw Jehonadab in the chariot with him. This was not the only time that designing men have strengthened themselves by drawing good men into their interests. Come then, said Jehu, come with me and see my zeal for the Lord. This is commonly taken as giving cause to suspect that Jehu's heart was not right with God in what he did, and that the zeal he pretended for the Lord was really zeal for himself and his own advancement. For, 1. He boasted of it, and spake as if God and man were indebted to him for it. 2. He desired it might be noticed, like the pharisees, who did all to be seen of men. An upright heart approves itself to God, and covets no more than his acceptance. If we aim at the applause of men, we are upon a false foundation. Whether Jehu looked any further we cannot judge.

The service of Baal was the crying sin of the house of Ahab; multitudes yet remained, that were infected with it, and would be in danger of infecting others. The law of God was express, that they were to be put to death. By a fraud Jehu brings them together to the temple of Baal: this cannot be justified. The truth of God needs not any lie. He required the attendance of all the worshippers of Baal, to join him in a sacrifice to Baal. The baalites come with joy from all parts to celebrate the solemnity. Jehu takes care that none of the servants of the Lord should be among them, and gives order for cutting of them all off. This was accordingly done, and the doing of it was, considering the nature of their crime, really righteous. The idolaters being thus destroyed, the idolatry is abolished for the present out of Israel.

15. Jehonadab was descended from the kenites, 1 Chron. 2. 55. An account of his descendants is given, Jeremiah 35. Joining hands is considered as a pledge of fidelity in the east, and is a usual form on entering into a contract.

Ver. 29—36. *Jehu king of Israel follows Jeroboam's sins—Hazeal smites Israel.*

Here is all the account of the reign of Jehu. God pronounced that to be right which he had done. It is justly questionable whether he did it from a good principle, and whether he did not take some false steps in the doing of it; yet God promised him a reward, that his children of the fourth generation from him should sit upon the throne of Israel. No services done for God shall go unrewarded. Yet Jehu was partial in his reformation. He departed from the sins of Ahab, but not from the sins of Jeroboam. True conversion is not only from gross sin, but from all sin; not only from false gods, but from false worships. True conversion is not only from wasteful sins, but from gainful sins; not only from sins destructive to worldly interests, but from those that support and befriend them; in forsaking which is the great trial whether we can deny ourselves and trust God. Jehu showed great care and zeal for the rooting out of a false religion, but in the true religion, he showed no care, took no heed, was not solicitous to please God, and do his duty. Those that are heedless, it is to be feared, are graceless; where there is a good principle in the heart, it will make men cautious and circumspect, desirous to please God, and jealous of doing any thing to offend him. It seems he was a man that had little religion himself, yet God used him as an instrument of reformation in Israel. It is a pity that those who do good to others, should not always be good themselves. However, the church and the world may often reap advantage from the partial obedience of such persons, and God will recompense their outward services with outward rewards.

The people were generally as careless. There was a general decay of piety, and increase of profaneness; therefore it is not strange that in those days the Lord began to cut Israel short. They were short in their duty to God, therefore God cut them short in their extent, wealth, and power. Hazeal king of Syria was, above any other, vexatious and mischievous to them. Now the reubenites and gadites smarted for the choice their ancestors made of an inheritance on that side Jordan, which Moses reproved them for, Numb. 32. Now Hazeal did what Elisha foretold he would do. Yet, for

doing it, God had a quarrel with him, and with his kingdom: see Amos 1. 3, 4. Notice is taken, in general, of Jehu's might; but, as he took no heed to serve God, the memorials of his mighty enterprises and achievements are justly buried in oblivion. From the time he ceased to do the work of God, his actions and might are no further noticed in sacred scripture.

It is an entire goodness that God cares for. A partial obedience may be rewarded with a temporary blessing, but we never can have a comfortable assurance of an eternal recompence, if our hearts and ways are not perfect with God. Woe be to us, O God, if we are not all thine. We cannot but everlastingly depart from thee, if we depart not from every sin. Thou hast cleansed our hearts from the Baal of gross idolatries, O clear us from the golden calves of our petty corruptions!—(34.)

CHAPTER XI.

Ver. 1—3. *Athaliah usurps the government of Judah, and destroys the royal family, excepting Joash.*

When Athaliah, the queen-mother, heard that her son Ahaziah was slain by Jehu, she arose, and destroyed all she knew to be akin to the crown. Well might she be called Athaliah, that wicked woman, 2 Chron. 24. 7, Jezebel's own daughter. One of Joram's daughters, wife to Jehoiada the priest, hid one of the king's sons, Joash by name. It was a special providence that Joram, a wicked king, married his daughter to a godly priest. And with good reason did Joash when he grew up, set himself to repair the house of the Lord, for it had been a sanctuary to him; now was the promise made to David bound up in one life, and yet it did not fail. Thus to the Son of David will God, according to his promise, secure a spiritual seed, which, though sometimes reduced to a small number, brought very low, and seemingly lost, will be perpetuated to the end of time, hidden sometimes, and unseen, but hidden in God's pavilion, and unhurt.

(See 2 Chron. 22. 10—12.)

2. A chamber of beds. A room where the beds used in the east are stored up. These are no more than cotton mattresses, and a considerable quantity often are kept ready for immediate use when required, persons sleeping on them in their usual clothing.

Ver. 4—12. *Jehoiada anoints Joash, or Jehoash, and he is made king of Judah.*

Six years Athaliah tyrannized. While

Jehu was extirpating the worship of Baal in Israel, she was establishing it in Judah, as appears, 2 Chron. 24. 7. All this while Joash lay hid, entitled to a crown, and intended for it, yet in obscurity. Though the sons and heirs of heaven are now hidden, the world knows them not, 1 John 3. 1, yet the time is fixed when they shall appear in glory.

We may well think what a pleasing surprise this was to those who feared that the house and lineage of David were quite cut off. David had divided the priests into courses, which waited by turns; every sabbath-day morning a new company came in, but the company of the foregoing week did not go out till the sabbath evening, so that on the sabbath day, when double service was to be done, there was a double number to do it; these Jehoiada employed to attend on this great occasion. He armed them out of the magazines of the temple, with David's spears and shields, either his own or those taken from his enemies, which he devoted to God's honour. They were ordered to protect the young king, and to preserve the holy temple from being profaned by the people that would come together on this occasion: Jehoiada was not so zealous for the projected revolution, as to forget his religion.

The king was brought forth. A child indeed, but he had a good guardian, and, what was better, a good God to go to. Jehoiada, without delay, proceeded to crown this young king. 1. In token of his being invested with kingly power, he put the crown upon him. 2. In token of his obligation to govern by law, and to make the word of God his rule, he gave him the testimony, the book of the law, put a bible into his hand, in which he must read all the days of his life, Deut. 17. 18, 19. 3. In token of his receiving gifts of the Spirit, to qualify him for this great work to which he before was called, he anointed him. 4. In token of the people's acceptance of him, and subjection to his government, they clapped their hands for joy. They had reason to rejoice in the period now put to Athaliah's tyranny, and the prospect of the restoration and establishment of religion; they had reason to bid Joash welcome to the crown, and to pray, Let him live, who came to them as life from the dead, and in whom the house of David was to live. With such acclamations of joy and

satisfaction must the kingdom of Christ be welcomed into our hearts, when his throne is set up there, and Satan the usurper is deposed. Say, Let the King, even Jesus, live, for ever live and reign in my soul, and in all the world. It is promised, Psa. 72. 15, He shall live, and prayer shall be made for him, and his kingdom, continually.

12. The usual method of clapping hands in the east, is to strike with the four fingers on the mouth, uttering a joyful sound at the same time. —*Harmer.*

Ver. 13—16. *Athaliah put to death.*

Athaliah, like her mother Jezebel, hastened her own destruction. She was wretchedly infatuated by the transport both of fear and indignation she was in. She herself was the greatest traitor, and yet is first and loudest in crying, Treason, treason! The most guilty are commonly most forward to reproach others. Jehoiada gave orders to put her to death, as an idolater, a usurper, and enemy to the public peace; care was taken she should not be killed in the temple, or the courts of it, from reverence to that holy place.

Ver. 17—21. *The worship of the Lord restored.*

Jehoiada endeavoured to settle and secure the interests of religion, by a covenant between the people and God. King and people would cleave most firmly to each other, when both had joined themselves to the Lord. In this covenant, the king stands upon the same level with his subjects, and is as much bound to serve the Lord as any of them. By this engagement they renounced Baal, and resigned themselves to God's government. It is well with a people, when all the changes that pass over them help to revive, strengthen, and advance the interests of religion among them. And those are likely to prosper, who set out in the world under fresh and sensible obligations to God and their duty. By our bonds to God the bonds of every relation are strengthened, 2 Cor. 8. 5.

Jehoiada then settled the covenant between the king and the people. Covenants are of use, both to remind us of, and to bind us to the duties already binding on us. It is good, in all relations, for the parties to understand each other fully, particularly in that between prince and subject, that the one may understand the limits of his power and prerogative, the other of his liberty and property. Pursuant to their covenant with God,

they immediately abolished idolatry, which the preceding kings had introduced in compliance with the house of Ahab. All his worshippers, it seems, deserted the idol, except its priest Mattan, and he was slain. Having destroyed Baal's temple, they appointed officers over the house of God, to see that the service of God was regularly performed by the proper persons, in due time, and according to the instituted manner. Pursuant to their covenant with one another, they expressed a mutual readiness to help each other, and mutual satisfaction. The people rejoiced, and Jerusalem was quiet. The way for people to be joyful and at peace, is to engage cordially in the service of God; for the voice of joy and thanksgiving is in the dwellings of the righteous, but there is no peace for the wicked.

(See 2 Chron. 23.)

CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1—3. *Jehoash king of Judah reigns well all the days of Jehoiada.*

Jehoash did that which was right, as long as Jehoiada lived to instruct him. Many young men have wealth, and power, and liberty, before they know how to use it, and it is of bad consequence to them; but against this danger Jehoash was well guarded, by having such a good director as Jehoiada, and by having wisdom to hearken to him and be directed by him, even when he was grown up. It is a great mercy to young people, especially to all young men of consequence, to have those about them, who will instruct them to do that which is right in the sight of the Lord; and they do wisely and well for themselves, when willing to be counselled and ruled by such.

The high places were not taken away. In the country they had altars both for sacrifice and incense, to the honour of the God of Israel only, but, as it were, in competition with his altar at Jerusalem. Neither the king nor the priest had zeal enough to carry their reformation so far, nor courage and strength enough to encounter such an inveterate usage.

Ver. 4—16. *Jehoash orders the repair of the temple.*

The temple was out of repair, and there were breaches found in it. It was not only time that had made these breaches; the sons of Athaliah, out of enmity to the service of the temple, had damaged the

buildings, 2 Chron. 24. 7. The king was zealous. God requires from those who have power, that they use it for the support of religion, the redress of grievances, and reparation of decays. The temple had been his nursery and his sanctuary, when a child: in grateful remembrance he now was zealous for the honour of it. The king employed the priests to manage, as most likely to be hearty in the work. He gave them orders to levy the money of the dedicated things, either as redemption-money, Exod. 30. 13, or as estimation-money, Lev. 27. 2, 3, or as a free-will offering. This they were to gather, every man of his acquaintance, and it was supposed that there was no man but had acquaintance with some of the priests. We should take the opportunities God gives us, of exciting those we have particular acquaintance with, to that which is good.

Nothing was done effectually till the twenty-third year of this reign. This method did not answer. Another method was therefore taken. His apostasy, at last, gives cause to question whether Jehoash had as good an affection for the service of the temple as for the structure: many have been zealous for forms of godliness, who have been strangers to the power of it. However, we blame him not for reproving even his tutor, Jehoiada, when he saw him remiss; so convincing was his reproof, that the priests owned themselves unworthy to be longer employed. The money was put into a public chest, and then people brought readily not only their dues, but their free-will offerings, for so good a work. When public distributions are made faithfully, public contributions will be made cheerfully. But while they were getting all they could, for the repair of the temple, they did not break in upon the stated maintenance of the priests: the trespass-money and the sin-money given to them, Lev. 5. 15, 16, were reserved to them. Let not the servants of the temple be starved, under colour of repairing the breaches of it. The money was put into the hands of those who did the work, or had the oversight of it. They that were thus intrusted did the business carefully and faithfully. It is grievous that the fidelity and punctuality of tradesmen and mechanics often should shame the conduct of the Lord's priests, or that the activity of laymen should expose their lukewarm-

ness or indifference. These things are not the fault of the ministerial office, but of human nature, which that office alone will not mend. They did not lay it out in ornaments for the temple till the other work was completed, but in necessary repairs first; hence we may learn, in all our expenses, to give that the preference which is most needful, and, in dealing for the public, to deal as we would for ourselves, 2 Chron. 24. 14. When the workmen had set the temple in its proper state, they brought the surplus money without requiring to be called to an account, and then such vessels were made as had been taken away by Athaliah and her sons.

Ver. 17—21. *Submission of Jehoash king of Judah to Hazael—He is slain by his servants.*

When Joash revolted from God, and became both an idolater and a persecutor, the hand of the Lord went out against him; see 2 Chron. 24. Joash had neither spirit nor strength to make head against Hazael, but gave him all the gold that was in his house, and the treasures of the temple, to hire him to march another way. Thus he tempted Hazael to come again, and the next year the host of Syria came up against Jerusalem, destroyed the princes, and plundered the city, 2 Chron. 24. His own servants conspired against him and slew him; we are told in Chronicles, that his murdering the prophet, Jehoiada's son, was the provocation. Yet how unrighteous soever he was, vengeance was not theirs, nor did it belong to them to repay. God was righteous; and this was not the only time he let even kings know it was at their peril, if they touched his anointed, and did his prophets any harm. Thus fell Joash, who began in the spirit, and ended in the flesh. God usually sets marks of his displeasure upon apostates, even in this life; for they, of all sinners, most reproach the Lord.

Let us review the character of Joash, and consider what instruction we may gather from it. When we see what a sad conclusion there was to so promising a beginning, it ought to induce us to inquire into the circumstances of spiritual declension. If we know any thing of Christ as the foundation of our faith and hope, let us desire to know nothing but Christ.—May the work of the blessed Spirit on our souls be manifest; may we see, feel, and be earnest in seeking after Jesus in all his

fulness, suitableness, and grace, that our souls may be wholly and truly brought over from dead works to serve the living and true God.—(37.)

(See 2 Chron. 24.)

CHAPTER XIII.

Ver. 1—9. *Jehoahaz—his wicked reign in Israel.*

This chapter brings us again to the history of the family of Jehu. How unlike Israel appears here to what it had been, and might have been! How is its crown profaned, and its honour laid in the dust! We find that the king followed the sins of Jeroboam, and the people departed not from them. There could not be a greater reproach than these two idolized calves. In all the history of the ten tribes, we never find the least shock given to that idolatry. They, by their sins, provoked God to anger, and then he delivered them into the hands of Hazael and Benhadad. Surely never was any nation so often plucked and pillaged by their neighbours as Israel. This they brought upon themselves by sin; when they had provoked God to throw down their hedge, the goodness of their land did but tempt their neighbours to prey upon them.

It was the ancient honour of Israel that they were a praying people. Jehoahaz their king, in his distress, besought the Lord; applied himself for help, not to the calves—what help could they give him? but to the Lord. It becomes the greatest men to be humble petitioners at God's throne. Though God might justly have rejected the prayer, as an abomination to him, yet he hearkened unto Jehoahaz, and gave Israel a saviour; not to Jehoahaz himself, for Hazael oppressed Israel all his days, but to his son Joash. This gracious answer God gave to the prayer of Jehoahaz, in remembrance of his covenant with Abraham, Lev. 26. 42. See how swift God is to show mercy; how ready to hear prayers; how willing to find a reason to be gracious; else he would not look so far back as the ancient covenant Israel had so often broken, and forfeited all the benefit of. Let this invite and engage us for ever to him; and encourage even those who have forsaken him, to return and repent; for there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared. And if the Lord answer the mere cry of distress for temporal relief, much more will he regard the prayer of

faith for spiritual blessings. As he so long remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and spared their posterity for their sakes, much more will he remember Jesus and the covenant of which he was the Mediator, and for his sake pardon the transgressions of all that by true faith claim a spiritual relation to him.

1. As sons frequently reigned with their fathers during the hebrew monarchy, their reigns are made in some instances to commence from their partnership with their fathers in the throne, and in others from the commencement of their governing alone, after their father's decease. Thus we read here that Jehoahaz of Israel began to reign in the twenty-third year of Joash of Judah, and in ver. 10, we read it was in the thirty-seventh of Joash that Jehoash of Israel began to reign, though his father Jehoahaz reigned seventeen years, which would make it about the fortieth of Joash. This is explained by supposing his father admitted him to the government two or three years before his death. This explains respecting Jotham, 2 Kings 15. 30, 33, and is confirmed by the case of Jehoshaphat and his son. It explains other seeming differences in the books of Kings and Chronicles.—From T. H. Horne.

Ver. 10—19. *The reign of Jehoash king of Israel—Elisha assures him of victories over the syrians.*

Jehoash, or Joash, the grandson of Jehu, kept up the ancient and political idolatry of Jeroboam, and it is said, He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. That one evil was enough to leave a mark of infamy upon his name. It is observable, how lightly the inspired penman passes over his acts, leaving to common historians to record them, while he takes notice only of the respect he showed to Elisha. Elisha fell sick. He lived long; for it was now about sixty years since he was first called to be a prophet. From the anointing of Jehu, forty-five years before Joash began his reign, we find no mention of him till upon his death-bed. He might be useful to the last, though not so famous as formerly. Yet the good seed which faithful ministers sow in their lifetime may spring up after their death. Let not old people complain of obscurity, but rather be well-pleased with retirement.

The king came to Elisha to receive his dying counsel and blessing. It may turn much to our spiritual advantage to attend the sick-beds and death-beds of good ministers and other good men, that we may be encouraged in religion by the living comforts they have from it in a dying hour. The king lamented him in the same words with which Elisha had himself lamented the removal of Elijah, My father,

my father! Those who consider how much good men contribute to the defence of a nation, and to keep off God's judgments, see cause to lament the removal of them.

There is peculiar beauty and significance in this proverbial saying, "The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof," as used by the ancient israelites. Horses and chariots, in those ages, were the principal strength of the battle. Of these the israelites were destitute. We never read of their bringing any considerable number of cavalry into the field. But they had more than an equivalent in the fervent effectual prayers of those holy men of God.—(31.)

Elisha gave the king assurances of his success against the syrians, Israel's present oppressors. God's grace is not tied to one hand. He can bury his workmen, yet carry on his work. To animate the king, he gives him a token, by directing him to shoot an arrow toward Syria. Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands, to signify that in all his expeditions against the syrians, he must look up to God for direction and strength; must reckon his own hands not sufficient, but go on, in dependence upon Divine aid. The trembling hands of a dying prophet, as they signified the concurrence and communication of the power of God, gave this arrow more force than the hands of the king in his full strength. It is God that commands deliverance; and when he will effect it, who can hinder? The arrow of deliverance is his, Psa. 18. 14. The prophet then tried what improvement the king would make of his victories. He bid him smite with the arrows on the ground. The king showed not that eagerness which might have been expected. By contemning the sign, he lost the thing signified, to the grief of the dying prophet. Not being straitened in the power and promise of God, why should he be straitened in his own expectations and endeavours? It is a trouble to good men, to see those to whom they wish well forsake their own mercies; and to see them lose advantages against spiritual enemies.

Ver. 20—25. *Elisha's death—A miracle wrought by his bones—The victories of Joash king of Israel over the syrians.*

Elisha died in a good old age, and they buried him; what follows shows the power there was in his life to keep off judgments. As soon as he was dead, the moabites invaded the land; with roving,

sculking bands that murdered and plundered by surprise. God has many ways to chastise a provoking people. Trouble comes sometimes from that point whence we least feared it. The mention of this, immediately upon the death of Elisha, intimates, that the removal of God's faithful prophets is a presage of judgments coming.

His dead body communicated life to another dead body. This miracle was a confirmation of all his prophecies. By this it appeared that the Lord was still the God of Elisha, therefore Elisha still lived, for he is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And it may have a reference to Christ, by whose death and burial the grave is made to all believers a safe and happy passage to life. It likewise intimated that though Elisha was dead, yet, in the virtue of the promises made by him, Israel's interests, though they seemed sunk and lost, should revive and flourish. Elijah was honoured in his departure, Elisha was honoured after his departure. One way or other the rest of all saints will be glorious, Isa. 11. 10. And the death and burial of Jesus hath power to disarm the king of terrors, and to sanctify the tomb, as a safe depository for the believer's body till the general resurrection. Through Christ all blessings come from a reconciled God to repenting sinners. If we use his appointed means in the obedience of faith, and are not straitened in our desires and expectations of help, through unbelief, we shall be able to do all things through him strengthening us. Then shall we beat down our enemies till our deliverance is complete, and our rejoicing in the Lord abundant. May he give us strong and true faith, that our hearts may be established, that we may glorify his name, and that we may be serviceable to his people on earth in our way to our heavenly inheritance.

The sword of Joash king of Israel was successful against the syrians. The cause of his success was God's favour, ver. 23. The several expressions of the same import, call us to admire the triumphs of Divine goodness in the deliverance of such a people. It was of the Lord's mercies, that they were not consumed. He foresaw they would destroy themselves at last, but, as yet, he would give them space to repent. The slowness of God's process against sinners, is to the honour of his mercy, not the impeachment of his justice.

The effect of his success was Israel's benefit. Thrice Joash beat the Syrians, just as often as he had struck the ground with the arrows, then a full stop was put to the course of his victories. Many have repented, when too late, of their distrusts, and the straitness of their desires.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ver. 1—7. *Amaziah's good reign over Judah.*

Amaziah acted, in some measure, well; like Joash, but not like David. He began well, but did not persevere. It is not enough to do *that* which our pious predecessors did, merely to keep up the common usage, but we must do it *as* they did, from the same principle of faith and devotion, and with the same sincerity and resolution. Amaziah did justice on those who murdered his father. The children he slew not. Perhaps he was advised to that rigour, both in revenge, because the crime was extraordinary; and in policy, that the children might not plot against him, in revenge of their father's death; but he acted on the express law of God, Deut. 24. 16, to which he resolved to adhere, and trust God with the issue. God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, because every man is guilty before him, and owes him a death; so that if he require the life for the father's sin, he does no wrong, the sinner having forfeited it already by his own; but he does not allow earthly princes to do thus; the children, before them, are innocent, therefore must not suffer as guilty. In the field we find Amaziah triumphing over the Edomites who had revolted; see ch. 8. 22.

7. *Selah* signifies a rock. This place was Petra the capital of Arabia Petræa. The remains of it have been visited by modern travellers. Most of the habitations were excavations in the rocks.

Ver. 8—14. *Amaziah provokes Jehoash king of Israel, and is overcome.*

For several successions after the division of the kingdoms, that of Judah suffered much from the *enmity* of Israel. After Asa's time, for several successions, it suffered more by the *friendship* of Israel, and by the alliance and affinity they made with them. But now we meet with hostility between them again. Amaziah challenged Jehoash into the field. Hereby he showed himself proud, presumptuous, and prodigal of blood. Some think that he intended to avenge the injury which

the dismissed Israelites had lately done to his country, 2 Chron. 25. 13. They that challenge, are chargeable with that beginning of strife, which is as the letting forth of water. He that is eager either to fight, or to go to law, may perhaps have enough of it quickly, and be the first that repents it.

Jehoash mortifies his pride, by comparing himself to a cedar, a stately tree, and Amaziah to a thistle, a sorry weed. How may a humble man smile to hear two proud and scornful men set their wits on work, to vilify and undervalue one another! Unsanctified success excites pride; pride excites contentions. The effects of pride in others are insufferable to those who are proud themselves. These are the sources of trouble and iniquity in private life; but when they arise between princes they become the misery of whole kingdoms. Did men understand how mean, guilty, and polluted they are at their best estate, boasting would needs be excluded. Jehoash foretells Amaziah's fall; a wild beast trode down the thistle, and so put an end to his treaty with the cedar; so easily does Jehoash think his forces can crush Amaziah. He shows him the folly of his challenge; Thine heart has lifted thee up. See where the root of all sin lies; it is in the heart, thence it flows. It is not providence, the event, the occasion, whatever it is, that makes men proud, secure, discontented, or the like, but their own heart does it. Thou art proud of the blow thou hast given to Edom, as if that had made thee formidable to all mankind. Those wretchedly deceive themselves that magnify their own performances, and, because they have been blessed with some little success and reputation, conclude themselves fit for any thing, and sure of success. But what images can shadow forth the absurdity and madness of those who by their crimes challenge the Almighty to the conflict, and rush upon the thick bosses of his buckler!

Jehoash counsels Amaziah to be content with the honour he had won. Many would have had wealth and honour enough, if they had but known when they had enough. Amaziah persisted; his army was routed and dispersed; he himself was taken prisoner. Jehoash plundered Jerusalem, and returned to Samaria, laden with spoils. It was said of him, that he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord; and of Amaziah, that he did that

which was right; yet Jehoash triumphs thus over Amaziah. God would show, in Amaziah's fate, that he resists the proud; or because, whatever they were otherwise, Jehoash had lately been respectful to one of God's prophets, ch. 13. 14, but Amaziah had ill treated another, 2 Chron. 25. 16. God will honour those who honour him in his prophets.

9. The word here rendered thistle is translated thorn, 2 Chron. 33. 11; Prov. 26. 9; Cant. 2. 2; Hos. 9. 6. Probably the black thorn is meant.

Ver. 15—22. *Amaziah slain by conspirators.*

Amaziah survived his conqueror fifteen years. He was slain by his own subjects. He fled to Lachish; how long he continued concealed or sheltered there, we are not told, but, at last, he was there murdered. No further did the rage of the rebels extend, for they brought him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him there among his ancestors. Azariah, or Uzziah, seems to have been very young when his father was slain. Though the years of his reign are reckoned from that event, yet he was not admitted to the regal authority till eleven or twelve years afterwards.

(See 2 Chron. 25.)

Ver. 23—29. *Wicked reign of Jeroboam II. king of Israel.*

The reign of Jeroboam the second was the longest of all the kings of Israel; as long as Asa, 1 Kings 15. 10; yet one did that which was good, and the other evil. We cannot measure men's characters by the length of their lives, or their outward prosperity. He kept the way of all his ancestors and predecessors; but sin is never less evil in God's sight for being ancient usage.

God raised up Jonah the son of Amittai, and by him intimated the purposes of his favour to Israel. It is a sign that God has not cast off his people, if he continue faithful ministers among them. Happy is the land that has a succession of prophets, that the word of the Lord may endure for ever. Of this Jonah we read in that little book of scripture which bears his name; it is probable he had been but little conversant with the visions of God, when he acted as he did; and if so, it is an evidence of forgiveness, that he was afterward employed as a messenger of mercy to Israel. A commission amounts to a pardon, and he that had himself found mercy notwithstanding his provocations, could the better encourage them with the

hope of mercy. The event was according to the word of the Lord; he recovered those frontier-towns and countries that lay from Hamath in the north, to the sea of the plain, that is, the sea of Sodom, in the south, of all which the Syrians had possessed themselves. Two reasons are given why God blessed them with those victories; 1. Because the distress was very great, which made them objects of his compassion. They who seemed to have taken refuge in the safest places were destroyed, and there was none to help them, ver. 26. Though God saw not any signs of their repentance and reformation, in mere pity to them, he heard the cry of their affliction—no mention is made here of the cry of their prayers—and he wrought this deliverance for them by the hand of Jeroboam. Let those whose case is pitiable, take comfort from the Divine pity. We read of God's bowels of mercy, Isa. 63. 15; Jer. 31. 20; and that he is full of compassion, Psa. 86. 15. 2. Because the decree was not yet gone forth for their utter destruction; he had not as yet said, he would blot out the name of Israel. If it is understood of the dispersion of the ten tribes, he did say it, and do it, not long after; if of the utter extirpation of the name of Israel, he never said it, nor will ever do it; that name still remains under heaven in the gospel Israel, and will to the end of time.

Many prophets there had been in Israel; a constant succession of them in every age, but none left prophecies in writing till this age, and their prophecies are part of the canon of scripture. It was in the reign of this Jeroboam that Hosea, who continued very long a prophet, began to prophesy; he was the first that wrote his prophecies; the word of the Lord by him is called the beginning of the word of the Lord, Hos. 1. 2. Then that part of the word of the Lord began to be written. At the same time Amos prophesied, and wrote his prophecy; soon after Micah, then Isaiah, in the days of Ahaz and Hezekiah; thus God never left himself without witness, but in the darkest and most degenerate ages of the church, raised up some to be burning and shining lights in it, to their own age by their preaching and living, and a few by their writings to reflect light upon us on whom the ends of the world are come.

Joel, Amos, and Hosea, lived at the same time, predicting the calamities of the Jews, the bless-

ings of their restoration, the judgments upon their enemies, and other subjects of high nature. These prophets commenced their office by predicting three fearful judgments. The earthquake which took place in the reign of Uzziah and Jeroboam II. was foretold by Amos, ch. 1. 1, two years before it happened. The second was of the locusts, caterpillars, and canker-worm, such as the oldest men had never seen, Joel 1. Amos 7. The third was a miraculous drought, accompanied by fearful fire from heaven, Joel 1. 19; Hosea 4. 7.

The reader will do well to consult the tabular view of the prophets, in a subsequent part of this work, and to refer to the probable occasions on which they were delivered, as he reads the latter part of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles.

CHAPTER XV.

Ver. 1—7. *Reign of Azariah, or Uzziah, king of Judah.*

This is a short account of the reign of Azariah, or Uzziah. He did for the most part, that which was right. It was happy for the kingdom that a good reign was a long one. That God smote him with a leprosy is more largely related, with the occasion of it, 2 Chron. 26, where we have also a fuller account of the glories of the former part of his reign, as well as of the disgraces of the latter part of it.

(*Read here 2 Chron. 26.*)

Ver. 8.—31. *The latter kings of Israel.*

This history of about thirty-three years represents the affairs of the kingdom of Israel in the utmost confusion. Things were now hastening to a crisis with the kingdom of the ten tribes. Immorality, idolatry, and profaneness rapidly increased; this chapter renders much assistance in understanding the writings of the prophets who lived during the period. Though Judah was not without troubles, yet that kingdom was happy, compared with the distracted state of Israel under so many murderers, usurpers, and tyrants. The imperfections of true believers are very different from the allowed wickedness of ungodly men. And when the gratification of ambition, avarice, revenge, or lust requires, there is no treachery or barbarity such men may not be tempted to commit. Their madness is equal to their wickedness, for repeated examples of the fatal ends of those who have acted like them will not deter them. Such is human nature, such are our hearts if left to themselves, deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. We have reason, therefore, to be thankful for restraints, or being kept out of the way of temptation, and to beg of God continually to create

in us a clean heart, and to renew a right spirit within us. Yet in these horrid scenes the justice of God is manifest. Even innocent sufferers from man's wickedness must plead guilty before God, and may often read his just displeasure in the injustice and cruelty of their oppressors. But the wicked are stopped in their career; their lamp is put out in utter darkness. May we live the life of faith and holiness, and die the death of the righteous, that we may have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

20. Or, "to give to the king of Assyria fifty shekels of silver for each man," for each of his soldiers.—*Patrick.*

29. This was the first captivity. It included the tribes beyond Jordan and the north part of the land of Canaan; see also 1 Chron. 5. 26.

Ver. 32—38. *Jotham king of Judah.*

We have here a short account of the reign of Jotham king of Judah. He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. Though the high-places were not taken away, yet to draw people from them he showed great respect to the temple. If magistrates cannot do all they would, for the suppressing of vice and profaneness, let them do the more for the support and advancement of piety and virtue. If they cannot pull down the high-places of sin, yet let them build and beautify the high-gate of God's house.

Jotham died in the midst of his days. He was too great a blessing to be continued long to such an unworthy people. His death was a judgment, especially considering the character of his son and successor. In his days the confederacy was formed against Judah, by Rezin, and Remaliah's son, the king of Syria, and the king of Israel; which appeared so formidable in the beginning of the reign of Ahaz, that the heart of that prince was moved, and the heart of the people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind, Isa. 7. 2. The confederates were unjust in the attempt, yet it is here said, The Lord began to send them against Judah. Men are God's hand, the sword, the rod in his hand, which he makes use of as he pleases, to serve his own righteous counsels, though men are unrighteous in their intentions. This storm gathered in the reign of pious Jotham; but he came to his grave in peace, and it fell upon his degenerate son.

(*Read 2 Chron. 27.*)

CHAPTER XVI.

Ver. 1—4. *Ahaz king of Judah—His wicked reign.*

Few and evil were the days of Ahaz; few, for he died at the age of thirty-six; evil, for he did not do that which was right, like David. He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, who pleaded policy for their idolatry. In him it was the most unreasonable, impolitic thing that could be. He made his sons to pass through fire, to the honour of his idols. He burnt them, 2 Chron. 28. 3; burnt some of them, and perhaps made others to pass between two fires, or to be drawn through a flame, in token of their dedication to the idol.

2. It is probable that the numeral letter for 20, has here crept in instead of that denoting 30. See ch. 18. 2.—*J. P. Smith.*

Ver. 5—9. *Ahaz hires the king of Assyria to invade Israel and Syria.*

The confederate neighbours of Ahaz, the kings of Syria and Israel, thought to have made themselves masters of Jerusalem, and to have set a king of their own in it, Isa. 7. 6. Here is his project to get clear of them. Those whose hearts condemn them, will go any where in a day of distress, rather than to God. The sin itself was its own punishment; for though the king of Assyria hearkened to him, and made a descent upon Damascus, whereby he obliged the king of Syria to let fall his design against Ahaz, carrying the Syrians captive to Kir, as Amos had expressly foretold, ch. 1. 5, yet to compass this he enslaved himself, ver. 7. Had he thus humbled himself to God, and implored his favour, he might have been delivered upon easier terms. He also impoverished himself. It is common for those who have brought themselves into straits by one sin, to try to help themselves out by another; those who have alienated themselves from God, will make no difficulty of alienating any of his rights.

Ver. 10—16. *Ahaz takes a pattern from an idol's altar.*

God's altar had hitherto continued in its place, and in use; but here we have it taken away by wicked Ahaz, and another altar, an idolatrous one, put in the room of it. The model of this new altar was taken from one at Damascus by Ahaz. The wretched high priest, without scruple or hesitation, prepared one like it; and when Ahaz returned, the altar of God was removed to make way for it. His sacrifices were offered on this altar, not to the

God of Israel, but to the gods of Damascus; see 2 Chron. 28. 23; and when he borrowed the Syrians' altar, no marvel that he borrowed their gods. It seems that Ahaz pretended to advance the former altar into an oracle at which he might inquire, or, as some think, he meant that he would take advice what to do with the altar. Tradition reports that he demolished it, and made a sun-dial, called the dial of Ahaz, from the brass. The natural regard of the mind of man to some sort of religion is not easily extinguished; but except it be regulated by the word, and by the Spirit of God, it produces the most absurd superstitions, or the most detestable idolatries. Or at best it quiets the sinner's conscience with a round of unmeaning ceremonies. Infidels have often been remarkable for their credulity, believing the most ridiculous falsehoods.

Ver. 17—20. *Ahaz spoileth the temple.*

Ahaz defaced the bases on which the lavers were set, and took down the molten sea. These the priests used for washing. It is one of the greatest prejudices that can be done to religion, to obstruct the purifying of the priests, the Lord's ministers. He removed the covert for the sabbath, erected for conveniency, when, on the sabbath, they officiated in greater numbers than on other days. Whatever it was, it should seem that in removing it he intended to put a contempt upon the sabbath, and thus to open as wide an inlet as possible to all manner of impiety. The king's entry, which led to the house of the Lord, 1 Kings 10. 5, he turned another way. This he did for the king of Assyria. When those who have had a ready passage to the house of the Lord, turn it another way to please their neighbours, they are going down-hill apace toward ruin.

How are we relieved when contemplating such a king as Ahaz, and such a high priest as Urijah, by calling to mind the prophet's commission when sent to Ahaz, Isa. 7, to proclaim the approach of that hour when the Lord would raise up to himself a faithful Priest! Blessed Saviour, thou art indeed a Priest and a King. Thou art the very one given as a sign to Ahaz. Thou art Immanuel, God with us, God in our nature, the hope of glory. As God, the work of redemption is neither too great nor too heavy for thee; and as man, God dwelling in us, thou wilt be for us, and thou wilt accom-

plish and render effectual that which thou hast undertaken.—(37.)

(*Read 2 Chron. 28.*)

CHAPTER XVII.

Ver. 1—6. *Reign of Hoshea in Israel—The israelites carried captive by the assyrians.*

When the measure of iniquity is filled up, the Lord will forbear no longer. Then kings and people suffer on account of each other's crimes. We are told by the jewish writers that the golden calf had, before this, been carried away from Dan, and Hoshea did not enforce that idolatry, but allowed the israelites to go up to Jerusalem to worship, 2 Chron. 30. 5—11. But notwithstanding this, he did evil in the sight of the Lord, he was an ungodly man, murdered his predecessor, and usurped the throne, while the people were fully ripe for destruction. Yet the destruction came gradually. They were for some time made tributaries, before they were made captives to the king of Assyria. They brought the latter upon themselves by the indirect course they took to shake off the yoke of that monarch. Had the king and people of Israel applied to God, they might have recovered liberty, ease, and honour; but they trusted to the king of Egypt to assist in their revolt, which, if it had taken effect, had been only to change their oppressors. But Egypt became to them the staff of a broken reed. This provoked the king of Assyria to proceed against them with more severity. Men get nothing by struggling with the net, but entangle themselves the more.

The inhabitants of Samaria must have endured great affliction in this siege. The brief manner in which it is narrated, seems to intimate that the Lord did not now notice their affliction as he had done formerly. When Shalmanezzer became master of the land, he determined to change the inhabitants, and did so in part; but it was completed by Esarhaddon several years after, Ezra 4. 2. It is here spoken of by anticipation. Some of the poorer israelites were left in the land, especially the northern parts. The israelites who were carried captives to a great distance, were most of them lost among the nations; yet some appear to have returned with their brethren after the babylonish captivity, or to have united with the jews who were afterwards dispersed in other parts of the world.

4. About this time a series of contests began between the kings of Egypt and those of Assyria and other nations in Asia, which lay beyond Canaan, who successively became powerful. The land of Canaan lying between these contending powers, was often the occasion and seat of war, alternately dependent upon one or other of them, and at times divided among them.

6. This relates to the second captivity of Israel, it chiefly included the inhabitants of the central part of the land of Canaan: see also ch. 18. 11.

Ver. 7—23. *Captivity of the israelites.*

Though the destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes was but briefly related, it is in these verses largely commented upon, and the reasons of it assigned, not from the second causes, the weakness of Israel, their impolitic management, and the strength and growing greatness of the assyrian monarch, but only from the First Cause. It was destruction from the Almighty: the assyrian was but the rod of his anger, Isa. 10. 5.

The iniquities of Israel were many and aggravated, but their apostasy to idolatry was breaking their national covenant. They had as a nation experienced God's power and love, they had witnessed his vengeance on the idolatrous canaanites, yet they absurdly and wickedly worshipped their idols. They committed much secret idolatry in addition to that established by law, and finally so multiplied their temples and altars, that they were found in every village and shepherd's cot. They rejected the testimonies of God; they did not believe in his promises. God testified against the israelites, showed them their sins, and warned them of the fatal consequences by all the prophets, and all the seers, for so the prophets had been formerly called; and had pressed them to turn from their evil ways, ver. 13. We read of prophets, more or less, in every reign; God did not leave them without a succession of prophets, but they would not hear. When all these corrections did not prevail, God first rent Israel from the house of David. As Judah was hereby weakened, so Israel was hereby corrupted; for they made a man king who drove them from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin. This was a national judgment, and the punishment of their former idolatries; and, at length, God removed them out of his sight.

Also Judah kept not the commandments of God. Though they were not as yet quite so bad as Israel; yet they

walked in the statutes of Israel; and this aggravated the sin of Israel, that they communicated the infection of it to Judah. Those that bring sin into a country or family, bring a plague into it, and will have to answer for all the mischief that follows. And vast as the outward wickedness of the world is, the secret sins, sinful thoughts, desires, and purposes of mankind are much greater. There are outward sins which are marked by infamy; but ingratitude, neglect, and enmity to God, and the idolatry or impiety which proceed therefrom, are far more malignant. Without turning from every evil way, and keeping God's statutes, there can be no true godliness; but this must spring from belief of his testimony concerning wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness, and concerning his mercy in Christ Jesus. The rejection of his statutes is the effect of unbelief, through which men set themselves against God's commandments, and follow lying vanities. Having sold themselves to do evil, they will serve Satan with greater self-denial than ever could have been required of them in God's service.

Ver. 24—41. *Account of the nations placed in the land of Israel.*

Babylon was now under the king of Assyria, from whose dominions some of these new inhabitants were brought. These men had not met with any remarkable judgments while they served idols in their own countries; but they were made to understand that the Israelites were not dispossessed because God could not defend them, but because of their sins. They were also to be convinced that they could not live in the land which the Lord had called by his own name without his permission. A number of lions were let loose upon them. The desolations of war made way for the increase of wild beasts; but they were plagued with lions in so remarkable a manner, that they justly concluded they were sent by Jehovah. Therefore the king of Assyria desired to have them taught the manner of "the God of the land." He sent back one of the priests whom he had carried away captive: but though that priest might teach them to do better than they did, he was not likely to teach them to do well. However, he came and dwelt among them. They made a mongrel religion, worshipped the God of Israel and their own idols; they

agreed to worship the God of the land: but every nation made gods of their own besides. The idols of each country are here named. The learned are at a loss for the signification of several of these names, and cannot agree by what representations these gods were worshipped. Our ignorance concerning these idols teaches us the accomplishment of the word of God, that these false gods should all perish, Jer. 10. 11; they are forgotten, while the name of the true God shall continue for ever.

The terror of the Almighty will sometimes induce a forced or feigned submission in unconverted men; but such will form very unworthy thoughts of God, will expect to please him by outside forms, and will vainly endeavour to reconcile his service with the love of the world and the indulgence of their lusts. May that fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, possess our hearts, and influence our conduct, that we may be ready for every change. Our worldly settlements are uncertain; we know not whither we may be driven before we die, and we must soon leave the world; but the righteous hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken from him.

24. The completion of the ruin of the ten tribes is here related.

Ephraim was broken from being a kingdom before, but now he is broken from being a people. From that time to this no account can be given of the people of Israel as distinct from the people of Judah—where they have subsisted all this while, what is their situation or condition at present.—*Bp. Newton*. This valuable writer states a variety of opinions on the subject, and concludes that the ten tribes were in a manner lost in their captivity; a part returning to Jerusalem with the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, others remaining scattered among the nations in the countries to which they had been carried. This subject will be further noticed in connexion with the prophetic books.

33. They did not relinquish their own idolatry, but incorporated the worship of the true God with that of their idols. They were *afraid* of Jehovah, who had sent lions among them, and therefore they offered him a sort of worship that he might not thus afflict them: but they *served* other gods, devoted themselves *affectionately* to them.—*A. Clarke*.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Ver. 1—8. *Good reign of Hezekiah in Judah—He destroys idolatry.*

A general account is given of the reign of Hezekiah. His great piety was the more wonderful, because his father was very wicked and vile, one of the worst of the kings, yet he one of the best; which

may intimate that what good there is in any, is not of nature, but of grace, free grace, sovereign grace, which, contrary to nature, grafts into the good olive that which was wild by nature, Rom. 11. 24. And that this grace gets over the greatest difficulties and disadvantages; for from the most abandoned families, God sometimes raises up the highest ornaments and most useful friends to true godliness, to illustrate the sovereignty and power of his grace. When parents have been profane and wicked, their children should endeavour to the utmost to counteract the effects upon others.

Hezekiah was a genuine son of David. We have read of some who did that which was right, but not like David. Let us not suppose that when times and men are bad, they must needs grow worse and worse; that does not follow: after many bad kings, God raised one up like David himself. He was a zealous reformer of his kingdom; and we find, 2 Chron. 29. 3, he began betimes to be so. A deluge of idolatry had overspread the land, his spirit was stirred against it, and as soon as he had power, he set himself to abolish it. The brazen serpent was originally of Divine institution, but because it had been abused to idolatry, he brake it to pieces. It had been carefully preserved, as a memorial of God's goodness to their fathers in the wilderness, for the encouragement of the sick to apply themselves to God for a cure, and of penitent sinners to apply themselves to him for mercy. But, in process of time, they that would not worship images borrowed from the heathen, were drawn in by the tempter to burn incense to the brazen serpent, because that was made by order from God himself, and had been an instrument of good to them. Hezekiah showed the people that it was Nehushtan, nothing but a piece of brass, therefore it was an idle, wicked thing to burn incense to it.

The superstitious veneration paid to relics in the romish church, and all the impostures which have arisen from its absurd idolatries, are similar to the worship of the brazen serpent. All helps to devotion, not warranted by the word of God, interrupt the exercise of faith. They always lead to superstition and other dangerous evils. Human nature perverts every thing of this kind. True faith needs not such aids; the word of God, daily meditated upon, leads the mind to

realize past, future, and invisible things, as if present.

Hezekiah was eminent in his reformation for courage and confidence in God, and for constancy and perseverance in his duty—for this, there was none like him, that he clave to the Lord with a fixed resolution, and never departed from following him. He was with God, and God was with him. Having the special presence of God with him, he had wonderful success in all his enterprises. He threw off the yoke of the king of Assyria. The surest way to liberty is to serve God. He made a vigorous and successful attack upon the philistines. When he had purged out the corruptions his father had brought in, he might expect to recover the possessions his father had lost. Of his victories over the philistines, Isaiah prophesied, ch. 14. 28, &c.

(*Read here 2 Chron. 29. 30. 31.*)

Ver. 9—16. *Captivity of Israel—Sennacherib invades Judah, but is pacified by a tribute.*

The kingdom of Assyria was grown considerable, though we never read of it till the last reign; such changes there are in the affairs of nations and families. Some have blamed Hezekiah for revolting from the king of Assyria; but he rather sinned by yielding to him. He evidently distrusted the Lord's protection, and by his submission and purchase of his forbearance, he invited his further demands. Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, besieged Samaria, took it, and carried the people into captivity, because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God. This was related more largely in the chapter before, but it is here repeated, as that which stirred up Hezekiah and his people to purge out idolatry with so much zeal, because they saw the ruin which it brought upon Israel. Sennacherib, the succeeding king of Assyria, made an attempt against Judah. The descent he made upon Judah was a great calamity to that kingdom, by which God would try the faith of Hezekiah, and chastise the people, who are called a hypocritical nation, Isa. 10. 6, because they did not heartily comply with Hezekiah's reformation. Nations may meet with calamities, though true religion is promoted by general concurrence. The secret dislike, the hypocrisy and lukewarmness of numbers, require correction; such trials purify the faith and hope of the upright, and bring them to simplicity in dependence on God.

Ver. 17—37. *Rabshakeh sent again by Sennacherib—His blasphemies.*

This second invasion is computed to have been three years after the first. Having gained other victories, Sennacherib determined to reduce Jerusalem, as his father had done by Samaria. Those are wicked men indeed, let them be ever so great, whose principle it is not to make their promises binding any further than is for their interest.

Rabshakeh magnifies his master, the king of Assyria. But what are the greatest men when either they come to compare with God, or God comes to contend with them? *Psa.* 82. 6, 7. He endeavours to make them believe it would be much for their advantage to surrender. Rabshakeh speaks of making an agreement, when his master had so lately broken the agreement Hezekiah made with him, with a great present! Can those expect to be trusted, that have been grossly perfidious? One would wonder he should ever think to prevail by such gross suggestions as these, but that the devil does thus impose upon sinners every day by his temptations. He will persuade them, that their imprisonment would be to their advantage, that their captivity would be much more to their advantage! He aims especially to convince them that it was to no purpose for them to stand it out; What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? It were well if sinners would submit to the force of this argument, in seeking peace with God—It is, therefore, our wisdom to yield to him, because it is in vain to contend with him: what confidence is that which those trust in, who stand out against Him?

Three things Rabshakeh supposes Hezekiah might trust to, and he endeavours to make out the insufficiency of each. 1. His own military preparations. 2. His alliance with Egypt. The king of Israel had done so, and of this confidence he truly says, It is a broken reed. They that trust to any arm of flesh will find it no better than a broken reed; but Jehovah is the Rock of ages. 3. His interest in God, and relation to him; this was indeed the confidence in which Hezekiah trusted; he supported himself by depending on the power and promise of God. This Rabshakeh was sensible was their great stay, therefore he endeavours to shake this, as David's enemies tried to drive him from his confidence in God,

Psa. 3. 2; 11. 1; thus did Christ's enemies, *Matt.* 27. 43.

Three things Rabshakeh suggests to discourage their confidence in God, but they are all false. 1. That Hezekiah had forfeited God's protection by destroying the high-places and the altars. Thus one of the best deeds that king ever did in his life, is misconstrued as impious and profane! If that be represented as evil and a provocation to God, which is good and pleasing to him, we must not think it strange. 2. That God has given orders for the destruction of Jerusalem at this time. This is all an empty boast. He thought he had as good a warrant for seizing Jerusalem as Samaria; many that have fought against God, have pretended commissions from him. 3. That if Jehovah, the God of Israel, should undertake to protect them from the king of Assyria, yet he was not able. With this blasphemy Rabshakeh concludes his speech, comparing the God of Israel with the gods of the nations whom he had conquered. See here his pride; his high opinion of idols made him have a high opinion of himself as too hard for them. Also his profaneness; the God of Israel was the God of the whole earth, the only living and true God, the Ancient of days, and had often proved himself to be above all gods. The tradition of the jews is, that Rabshakeh was an apostate jew, which made him ready in the jews' language: if so, his ignorance of the God of Israel was the less excusable, and his enmity the less strange; for apostates are commonly the most bitter and spiteful enemies—witness Julian. A great deal of art and management, it must be owned, there is in this speech of Rabshakeh; but a great deal of pride, malice, falsehood, and blasphemy. Hezekiah's nobles held their peace. There is a time to keep silence, as well as a time to speak; and there are those to whom to offer any thing religious or rational, is to cast pearls before swine. What can be said to a madman? Their silence made Rabshakeh yet more proud and secure; his heart was lifted up and hardened to his destruction. It is often best to leave such persons to rail and blaspheme; a decided expression of abhorrence is the best testimony against them. The matter must be left to the Lord, who has all hearts in his hands, committing ourselves unto him in humble submission, believing hope, and fervent prayer.

17. These are the names of offices. Tartan signifies he that is over gifts or tribute; Rab-saris, the chief of the eunuchs; Rabshakeh, the chief cup-bearer.—*Calmet*.

37. When Rabshakeh blasphemed the Divine majesty, the king and the nobles rent their clothes, which was not usual unless the blasphemer were an israelite.—*Greenfield*.

CHAPTER XIX.

Ver. 1—7. *Hezekiah desires the prayers of Isaiah, and receives an answer of peace.*

Hezekiah discovered deep concern at the dishonour done to God by Rabshakeh's blasphemy; his relief is, that he has a God to go to, and we have here an account of what passed between him and his God on this occasion. He allowed that he and his people were unworthy of the Lord's favour, but urged him to rebuke and silence the reproachful words that had been spoken. In this hope he entreated the prophet to pray with earnestness and importunity; he did not send merely to inquire about the event. Those who speak from God to us, we should in a particular manner desire to speak to God for us. He is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, Gen. 20. 7. The great Prophet is the great Intercessor. Those are likely to prevail with God, that lift up their hearts in prayer.

Man's extremity is God's opportunity. While his servants can speak nothing but terror to the profane, the proud, and the hypocritical, they have comfortable words for the discouraged believer: Be not afraid. Thine enemies are the Lord's enemies; thy cause is his cause. In glorifying himself he must protect and save those that trust in him. He delights in giving the blessings for which thy soul is athirst, and with the breath of his mouth he can slay the wicked and disappoint all efforts against his church and every member of it.

7. Blast, in hebrew, a wind, a storm or tempest, by which name God's judgments are often called; that is, a violent, sudden, and terrible stroke, namely, the miraculous destruction of the assyrian army. Also the place may be rendered thus, "I will put a spirit within him so that he shall hear a rumour," &c. for by spirit is often understood an imagination or inclination, Numb. 5. 14; Rom. 11. 8; 2 Tim. 1. 7. Or, "a spirit against him"—and this interpretation seems most agreeable to the design of this verse, which is briefly to represent all the judgments that were to befall Sennacherib: the tidings about Tirhakah, in the words "he shall hear a rumour," and the returning to his own land and being slain there—the most remarkable of these, the destruction of his army, seems intended here. And the spirit here is the same as is called an angel, ver. 35, the latter

word being used to limit and explain the former, which is of doubtful signification.—*Poole*.

Ver. 8—19. *Sennacherib's blasphemous letter—Hezekiah lays it before the Lord.*

Rabshakeh left Jerusalem when he found Hezekiah would not surrender. The siege was postponed till Sennacherib should come in person against it. After the former levy of contributions upon Hezekiah, Sennacherib had marched into Egypt, where, while he was besieging Pelusium, he heard that Tirhakah king of Ethiopia was marching against him. He then raised the siege, and returning into Judea besieged Libnah; but finding Tirhakah pursued him, he turned back, and having defeated him, again proceeded to attack Hezekiah, having in the interval vented the blasphemy of his heart by a letter. The Lord finds wicked men other work when he would give his servants a breathing time.

Hezekiah went up to the temple, presented himself, and then spread the letter before the Lord. Hereby he signified that he acknowledged God in all his ways, and that he referred himself to God, and his righteous judgment, upon the whole matter. Prayer is the never-failing resource of the tempted christian, whether struggling with outward difficulties, or inward foes. At the mercy-seat of his almighty Friend he opens his heart, spreads his case, and makes appeal. When he can discern that the glory of God is engaged on his side, faith gains the victory, he again exults in the assurance that he shall never be moved. The weapons of our warfare are mighty through God to repel the assaults of Satan and his ministers, and to cast down every imagination, or reasoning, or high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and the obedience of Christ, 2 Cor. 10. 3—5. Hezekiah prayed that God would glorify himself in the defeat of Sennacherib, and the deliverance of Jerusalem out of his hands. The best pleas in prayer are taken from God's honour; the Lord's prayer begins with, Hallowed be thy name, and concludes with, Thine is the glory.

Ver. 20—34. *The fall of Sennacherib prophesied.*

We have here the gracious answer God gave to Hezekiah's prayer. This message speaks confusion and shame to Sennacherib and his forces. The prophet directs his speech to him, Isa. 10. 5. Sennacherib is here represented, 1. As the

scorn of Jerusalem. Though to an eye of sense the enemy looked formidable, to an eye of faith he looked despicable. 2. As an enemy to God; and that was enough to make him miserable. 3. As a proud vain-glorious fool, that magnified his own achievements out of measure. Sennacherib had appealed to what the kings of Assyria had done, ver. 11; in answer to that he is reminded of what God had done for Israel of old. Sennacherib's boasts are exposed, Isa. 10. 13, 14. By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, &c. and they are answered, ver. 15. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? If God be the principal Agent in all that is done, boasting is for ever excluded.

All his motions were under the Divine cognizance. It is great comfort to all the church's friends, that God can make even the wrath of their enemies to serve and praise him, and then restrain the remainder of it. It also speaks salvation and joy to Hezekiah and his people. This shall be a sign to them of God's favour, and that he is reconciled to them, and his anger is turned away, Isa. 12. 1, a wonder in their eyes, for so a sign sometimes signifies, a token for good, and an earnest of the further mercy God has in store for them, that a good issue shall be put to their present distress in every respect. God himself undertakes to defend the city, and that person, that place, cannot but be safe, which he undertakes the protection of. The honour and truth of God are engaged for the doing of all this.

The devastations of the assyrians probably had prevented the land from being sown that year. The next is supposed to have been the sabbatical year, but the Lord engaged that the produce of the land should be sufficient for their support during those two years. As the performance of this promise was after the destruction of Sennacherib's army, it was a sign to Hezekiah's faith, assuring him of that present deliverance as an earnest of the Lord's future care of the kingdom of Judah. The ten tribes were carried captive, Judah was brought low. The professed worshippers of God were few, and seemed to be devoted to ruin. But that remnant was to be as seed-corn in a fruitful soil, springing up and yielding a large increase. They should go forth from mount Zion to repossess the land, and to

spread to distant countries. They were a typical resemblance of the apostles and primitive christians, who from Jerusalem carried the gospel to all the earth. This the Lord would perform not for their righteousness, but his own glory, for the sake of his beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased. May our hearts be as good ground, that his word may strike root therein, and bring forth fruit in our lives.

28. Animals in the east are often managed by a hook or ring inserted in the nostrils of the beast, to which the bridle is fastened.

Ver. 35—37. *The assyrian army destroyed—Sennacherib slain by his sons.*

Sometimes it was long ere prophecies were accomplished, and promises performed; but here the word was no sooner spoken than the work was done. The army of Assyria was entirely routed. That night which immediately followed the sending of this message to Hezekiah, when Rabshakeh seems to have rejoined the king—that night the main body of their army was slain upon the spot. God sent his angel, a destroying angel, in the dead of the night, to make an assault upon them. It was not by the sword of a mighty man, or of a mean man, that is, not of any man at all, but of an angel, that the assyrian army was to fall, Isa. 31. 8, such an angel as slew the first-born of Egypt. The number slain was very great, 185,000 men; scarcely a living man left in the army! Some think the 76th Psalm was penned on this occasion, where we read that the stout-hearted were spoiled, and slept their sleep, their last, their long sleep. See how great, in power and might, the holy angels are, when one angel, in one night, could make so great slaughter. See how weak the mightiest men are before almighty God. Who ever hardened himself against Him and prospered?

The king of Assyria was put into the utmost confusion. He is supposed to have survived this for some time, and to have lived in great contempt, but exercising cruelty towards his subjects, till his own sons became his murderers. Justly are sons suffered to rebel against their father that begat them, when he rebels against the God that made him. They whose children are undutiful, ought to consider whether they have not been so to their Father in heaven? The God of Israel had done enough to convince him that he was the only true God, whom

therefore he ought to worship; yet he persists in his idolatry, and seeks to his false god for protection against a God of irresistible power.

This history exhibits a strong proof of the efficacy of firm trust and confidence in God. He will afflict, but not forsake his people. He may reduce them to such extremities that all hope may seem to be taken away. But those are the seasons in which he generally appears for the manifestation of his power, faithfulness, and love. In the mean time they are required to evidence simple and unreserved dependence on him, and by fervent supplication to implore his help. It is well when our troubles drive us to our knees. The example of Hezekiah teaches us that men ought always to pray, and not to faint. But does it not reprove our unbelief? How unwilling are we to rest on the declaration of Jehovah! How desirous to know in what way he will save us! how impatient when relief is delayed! But it is the peculiar province of faith to derive support from God when all human resources fail, and to wait for the completion of his word, though we see not how it can be accomplished. "Lord, help our unbelief!" For how much does it prevent our comfort and advancement in religion! How often does it hinder and discourage us in prayer!—(60.)

35. Some modern writers consider that the destruction of the assyrian army was effected by the simoom, or pestilential wind, which frequently prevails in the east, particularly Arabia, the effects of which, during the short time of its continuance, are described by Bruce and others as most extraordinary and destructive of animal life. There are however many objections to this; and even if it were the instrument which God used to effect this extraordinary destruction, the miracle would not be diminished, especially as it took place in the night, whereas the time of the simoom is usually soon after noon. Also see note, ver. 7. This miraculous destruction of the assyrian army is related by Herodotus, but the cause is disguised by a legendary tale.

(See 2 Chron. 32.)

CHAPTER XX.

Ver. 1—11. *Hezekiah's sickness—His recovery in answer to prayer.*

Hezekiah was sick unto death in those days; that is, in the same year in which the king of Assyria besieged Jerusalem. Hezekiah reigning, in all, twenty-nine years, and surviving this fifteen years, this must be in his fourteenth year, and so was the siege, ch. 18. 13. Some think

it was at the time that the assyrian army was besieging the city, or preparing for it, because God promises, ver. 6, I will defend this city; which promise was afterwards repeated, when the danger came to be most threatening, ch. 19. 34.

A warning to prepare for death is brought to Hezekiah by Isaiah; we cannot expect to receive from God's prophets other than what they have received from the Lord; we must welcome that, be it pleasing or displeasing. He prayed unto the Lord. Is any sick? let him be prayed for, let him be prayed with, and let him pray. When God purposes mercy, he will, for this, be inquired of, Ezek. 36. 37. We have not, if we ask not, or ask amiss. Prayer is one of the best preparations for death, because by it we fetch in strength and grace from God to enable us to finish well.

He could not retire to his closet as he used to do, but he retired as well as he could to converse with God. When we cannot be so private as we would be in our devotions, nor perform them with the usual outward expressions of reverence and solemnity, yet we must not therefore omit them, but compose ourselves as well as we can. He wept sore: some gather from hence that he was unwilling to die; it is in the nature of man to dread the separation of soul and body: there was also something peculiar in Hezekiah's case; he was now in the midst of his usefulness, having begun a good work of reformation, which he feared, if he should die, would fall to the ground, through the corruption of the people. Perhaps these were only tears of importunity, and expressions of lively affection in prayer. Jacob wept and made supplication, and our blessed Saviour, though most willing to die, yet offered up strong cries, with tears, to him whom he knew to be able to save him, Heb. 5. 7. Let Hezekiah's prayer interpret his tears, and in that we find nothing which intimates his having been under any of that fear of death, which has either bondage or torment.

Hezekiah's piety made his sick-bed easy. The testimony of conscience that we have walked with God, will be a support and matter of rejoicing when we come to look death in the face, 2 Cor. 1. 12. Also see the humble mention he makes of it to God; Lord, remember it now; not as if God needed to be put in mind of any thing by us; nor, as if

the reward might be demanded as due; it is Christ's righteousness only that is the purchase of mercy and grace. But our own sincerity may be pleaded. It is the work of thine own hands; Lord, own it. Hezekiah does not pray, Lord, spare me; or, Lord, take me, God's will be done; but, Lord, remember me; whether I live or die, let me be thine. The mercy of our God, and the merits of our heavenly Advocate, form the sinner's never-failing plea. God immediately gave answer to this prayer. The prophet was sent to tell him that he should recover. Not that there is with God yea or nay, or that he ever says and unsays; but, upon Hezekiah's prayer, which he foresaw, and to which his Spirit inclined him, God did that for him. God honours his prayers by noticing them, and the reference to them in this message; I have heard thy prayers, I have seen thy tears. God exceeds Hezekiah's prayers. He promises to grant him recovery, so that he should go to the house of God on the third day, and engages to add fifteen years to his life. Also to deliver Jerusalem from the king of Assyria. God always hears the prayers of the broken in heart, and will give health, length of days, and temporal deliverances, as much and as long as is truly good for them.

Means were to be used for his recovery; this might contribute something to the cure, and yet, considering to what a height the disease was come, and how suddenly it was checked, the cure was miraculous. It is our duty, when sick, to use such means as are proper to help nature, else we do not trust God, but tempt him. Plain and ordinary medicines must not be despised; for many such God has graciously made serviceable to man, in consideration of the poor. What God appoints, he will make effectual. Hezekiah begged a sign for the encouragement of his faith, not in distrust of the power or promise of God, but because he looked upon the things promised to be worthy to be so confirmed, and because it had been usual with God thus to glorify himself, and favour his people. He remembered how much God was displeased with his father Ahaz for refusing to ask a sign, Isa. 7. 10—12. Hezekiah asked, What is the sign, that I shall go up to the house of the Lord; he desired to recover, that he might serve God. It was put to his choice, whether the sun should

go back or go forward, for this was equal to Omnipotence, and it would be the more likely to confirm his faith, if he chose that which he thought to be the more difficult. It is supposed the degrees were half hours, and that it was noon. The question is, Shall the sun go back to its place at seven in the morning, or forward to its place at five in the evening? He humbly desired that the sun might go back for a space.

For the confirmation of his faith, the shadow of the sun was carried back ten degrees, and the light considerably protracted in a miraculous manner.—(60.) This work of wonder shows the power of God in heaven as well as on earth, the great notice he takes of prayer, and the great favour he bears to his chosen.

7. It is unnecessary to discuss the propriety of this application as a remedy, since the cure evidently was miraculous.

11. As the word translated degrees, means steps or stairs, many have imagined it was a kind of ascent to the gate of the palace, marked with figures showing the divisions of the day, rather than a regular piece of dial work.—*T. H. Horne.* (*Read Isaiah 38. 9—21.*)

Ver. 12—21. *Hezekiah shows his treasures to the ambassadors from Babylon—His death.*

The king of Babylon seems at this time to have been independent of the king of Assyria, though shortly after subdued by him. Having heard of Hezekiah's sickness, and the miraculous circumstances of his recovery, he wished to enter into confederacy with him. Hezekiah was too well pleased with this plan, and to convince the ambassadors that he was a desirable ally, he showed them his treasures, armour, and other evidences of his wealth and power. This was the effect of pride and ostentation, and tended to form an alliance with an idolatrous prince, depending on an arm of flesh, and departing from simple reliance on God. He also seems to have missed the opportunity of instructing the chaldeans concerning Him who had wrought the miracles which excited their attention, and of showing them the absurdity and evil of idolatry, especially their worship of the sun, which evidently was at the power of the God of Israel.

What is more common, and, as we think, more innocent, than to show our friends our houses and their furniture, our gardens, stables, and libraries? But if we do this in the pride of our hearts, to gain applause from men, and not giving praise to God, it turns into sin unto us, as

it did to Hezekiah. This foolish pride the Lord will rebuke and correct in those he loves, especially when they prize the opinion of ungodly men, and court their acquaintance on account of any attachment they profess. We may expect vexation from every object with which we are inordinately pleased.

Isaiah, who had often been Hezekiah's comforter, is now his reprover. The blessed Spirit is both, John 16. 7, 8. Ministers must be both, as there is occasion. Isaiah spake in God's name, and therefore called him to account as having authority. Hezekiah made an ingenuous confession. The sentence passed upon him is, that the treasures he was so proud of, should become a prey. It is just with God, to take that from us, which we make matter of our pride, and in which we put our confidence. The king of Babylon with whom he so desired to be allied, should be the enemy that would make a prey of them. The sins of Manasseh were the cause of that calamity; but it is now foretold to Hezekiah, to convince him of the folly of his pride, and of the value he had for the king of Babylon, and to make him ashamed of it. Hezekiah could not have been more mortified than by such a thought. Babylon will ruin those that are fond of Babylon. Wise therefore and happy are they that come out from her, Rev. 18. 4.

Hezekiah allowed the justice of the sentence, and God's goodness in the respite. Yet the prospect respecting his family and nation must have occasioned him many painful sensations. True penitents, when under Divine rebukes, call them not only just, but good; not only submit to, but accept the punishment of their iniquity. So Hezekiah did; by this it appeared, that he was indeed humbled for the pride of his heart. And here is the conclusion of Hezekiah's life and history. God hath wise and righteous reasons for all that he doth, or permiteth to be done. Shortly our trials and services will end together. Our space is limited, though we know not those limits, and then we shall sleep with our fathers. And, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.

(*Read 2 Chron. 32. 24—33.*)

The following dates of events connected with the reign of Hezekiah are from *Prideaux*. 726, Hezekiah restores religion. 724, Salmaneser

lays siege to Samaria. 721, He takes it. 720, Salmaneser besieges Tyre. 719, Sevechus succeeds So in Egypt. 715, Sennacherib succeeds Salmaneser. 714, He invades Judea. Hezekiah's sickness. 713, Merodach-baladan's embassy to Hezekiah. Sennacherib invades Egypt. 710, Sennacherib on his return from Egypt invades Judea; his army destroyed. 709, The medes revolt from Sennacherib. 706, He is slain. 705, Tirhakah succeeds Sevechus in Egypt. 698, Hezekiah dies: see *Townsend*.

CHAPTER XXI.

Ver. 1—9. *Wicked reign of Manasseh.*

Young persons generally desire to become their own masters, and obtain early possession of riches and power. But this for the most part ruins their future comfort, and produces mischief to their connexions. It is much happier when youth is sheltered under the care of parents or guardians till more matured age gives experience and discretion. Though such young persons are less indulged, they will afterwards be thankful for the restraints under which they have been placed.

Manasseh was but twelve years old when he began to reign. He did that which was evil, which, having been well educated, he must know was so. He wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord, as if on purpose to provoke him to anger. He did after the abominations of the heathen; nay, he did more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed. He not only rebuilt the high-places his father had destroyed, but proceeded to that which was much worse. He set up other gods, Baal and Ashtarothe, (translated a grove,) and all the host of heaven, the sun, moon, and stars: these he worshipped and served, built altars, and offered sacrifices. He dedicated his son as a votary to Moloch. Conjurers and fortune-tellers, who pretended to foretell things to come, by the stars or the clouds, lucky and unlucky days, good and bad omens, were his intimates and his confidants; their arts pleased his fancy, and gained his belief; his counsels were under their direction. We find that he shed innocent blood.

Infidel neglect of true religion is often joined with the most absurd credulity and the most ridiculous superstitions, and none are more abandoned than those who become wicked after a religious education. They cannot have quietness in vice till they have stupified their consciences, and the greater the obstacles before men can fully indulge their lusts,

the more depraved they are afterwards. The blood of the prophets is charged upon Jerusalem, and it is probable that Manasseh put many of them to death. The tradition of the jews is, that he caused the prophet Isaiah to be sawn asunder; many think the apostle refers to it, Heb. 11. 37.

He set up images and altars in the house of the Lord. Thus he defied God, and when the worshippers of God came to the place appointed for the performance of their duty, they found, to their great grief and terror, other gods ready to receive their offerings. Soon after Hezekiah's death, the reformation seems to have been overturned, and Manasseh proceeded from bad to worse, until carried captive to Babylon. He proposed one idolatry after another, and the people were ready to comply with his wishes, both to obtain his favour and because it suited their depraved inclinations. These events, as well as the testimony of the prophets, show that Hezekiah's reformation had been complied with in a reluctant and hypocritical manner, especially by the chief men; and that the nation was fast ripening for destruction, becoming even worse than the ancient canaanites. In the reformation of large bodies, numbers are mere time-servers, and in temptation fall away.

Ver. 10—18. *The prophetic denunciations against Judah.*

Here is the doom of Judah and Jerusalem. The prophets were sent to teach them the knowledge of God, to remind them of their duty, and direct them in it: if they succeeded not in that, their next work was to reprove them for their sins, that they might repent and reform. If in this they prevailed not, their next work was to foretell the judgments of God, that terror might awaken those to repentance, who would not be made sensible of the obligations of his love; or else that the execution of judgments, in their season, might be proofs of the Divine mission of the prophets. We have here a recital of their crimes, and a prediction of the judgments God would bring on Judah and Jerusalem. The judgment should be very terrible and amazing, copied, as the sins of Jerusalem had been, from Samaria, and the house of Ahab, Isa. 28. 17. Those who resemble and imitate others in their sins, must expect to fare as they fared.

The similitude used represents the city

emptied and utterly desolate, yet not destroyed thereby, but cleansed, and reserved for the future residence of the jews: forsaken, yet not finally, and only as to external privileges; for individual believers were preserved in that visitation. The Lord will cast off any professing people who dishonour him by their crimes, but never will desert his cause on earth. Justly are those that forsake God, forsaken of him; nor does he ever leave any, till they have first left him; they then become an easy prey to all their enemies. The men of this generation, treading in their fathers' steps, are justly reckoned with for their father's sins. The guilt of blood filled the measure. Nothing cries louder, nor brings sorer vengeance.

This is all we have here of Manasseh; but in the book of Chronicles we hear of his repentance, and acceptance with God. Some exceedingly wicked men have not only been spared but pardoned; but such sinners cannot forgive themselves; they would live and die covered with shame and self-aborrence for their sins.

Thus we may learn not to despair of the recovery of the greatest sinners. Had we witnessed the enormous wickedness of Manasseh, we should have given him up for lost. Is any thing too hard for the Lord? No, he is able to save to the uttermost. But let none dare to persist in sin, presuming they may repent and reform when they please. There are a few instances of the conversion of notorious sinners that none may despair; and but few, that none may presume.—(7.)

(*Read 2 Chron. 33. 11—20.*)

10. Hosea, Joel, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Isaiah prophesied at this period.

Ver. 19—26. *Wicked reign and death of Amon.*

Here is a brief account of the short and inglorious reign of Amon, the son of Manasseh. His reign was very wicked. He trod in the steps of his father's idolatry, and revived that which he, in the latter end of his days, had put down. Those who set bad examples, though they may repent, yet cannot be sure that those whom they have drawn into sin by their example will repent; it is often otherwise. Having rebelled against God, his own servants slew Amon when he had reigned but two years. He profaned God's house with his idols; now God suffered his house to be polluted with his blood. How unrighteous soever they were that did it, God was righteous who

suffered it to be done. The people of the land did justice on the traitors that had slain the king. Thus they cleared themselves from having any hand in the crime, and did what was their duty. Now they made a happy change from one of the worst, to one of the best of the kings of Judah. Once more, says God, they shall be tried with a reformation; and if that succeed, well; if not, then after that I will cut them down. Whether the Lord bear long with presumptuous offenders, or speedily cuts them off in their sins, all must perish who persist in forsaking the Lord, and refusing to walk in his ways.

(See 2 Chron. 33. 21—25.)

CHAPTER XXII.

Ver. 1—10. *Josiah's good reign—His care for repairing the temple—The book of the law found.*

Josiah was very young when he began to reign—but eight years old. The different events of Josiah's early succession from that of Manasseh, must be ascribed to the distinguishing grace of God; yet probably the persons that trained him up were instruments in producing this difference. He was early brought under serious impressions, and in the eighth year of his reign, or the sixteenth of his age, he began to seek the Lord. Four years after, he set about a public reformation, though it was not effected till the eighteenth year of his reign, 2 Chron. 34. 1—8. His character was most excellent. He copied the faith, zeal, and piety of David, and kept the path of true godliness. Had the people concurred in his reformation as heartily as he persevered in it, blessed effects would have followed. But they were most wicked and infatuated in idolatry. We do not obtain full knowledge of the state of Judah from the historical records, unless we refer to the writings of the contemporary prophets.

Josiah proceeded to reinstate the temple and its worship. The money for this purpose was collected by voluntary contribution, as by Jehoash, ch. 12. 4; but the levites proved more active and faithful than the priests had then been, and the workmen were as worthy of confidence. In the repairing of the temple, the book of the law was found and brought to the king. Some think it was the original of the five books of Moses, others think it

was only an ancient and authentic copy: most likely it was that which, by the command of Moses, was laid up in the most holy place, Deut. 31. 24. It seems, this book of the law was lost and missing; either carelessly mislaid and neglected, as some throw their bibles into corners, or maliciously concealed by some of the idolaters, or, as some think, carefully laid up, lest it should fall into the hands of its enemies. If the holy scriptures had not been of God, they had not been in being at this day. God's care of the bible is a plain indication of his interest in it. Whether this was the only authentic copy in being or not, it seems the things contained in it were new, both to the king and to the high priest. Perhaps the people generally were satisfied with abstracts of the law; a sort of ritual, directing them in the observances of their religion, but leaving out some passages, and particularly the promises and threatenings, Lev. 26. and Deut. 28. &c., for those were the portions of the law which Josiah was so much affected with. They were new to him. No summaries, extracts, or collections out of the bible, can convey and preserve the knowledge of God and his will, like the bible itself. It was no marvel that the people were so corrupt, when the book of the law was so scarce; where that vision is not, the people perish; they that corrupted them, no doubt, used arts to get that book out of their hands. The church of Rome could not keep up the use of images, but by forbidding the use of the scripture.

It was a great instance of God's favour, and a token for good to Josiah and his people, that the book of the law was thus seasonably brought to light, to direct and quicken the blessed reformation Josiah had begun. It is a sign that God has mercy in store for a people, when he magnifies his law among them, and makes that honourable, and furnishes means for the increase of scripture knowledge. The translating of the scriptures was the glory, strength, and joy of the reformation from popery. They that do their duty according to their knowledge, shall have their knowledge increased; the book of the law was an abundant recompence for all their care and cost about the repair of the temple. The abundance of bibles we possess aggravates our national sins; for what greater contempt of God can we show, than to refuse to read his word

when put into our hands, or, reading it, not to believe and obey it?

Hilkiah was exceedingly pleased with the discovery—Carry it to the king, it is the richest jewel of his crown, read it before him; he walks in the way of David his father; if he be like him, he will love the book of the law, and bid it welcome; it will be his delight and his counsellor. By the holy law is the knowledge of sin, and by the blessed gospel is the knowledge of salvation. When the former is understood in its strictness and excellence, the sinner begins to inquire, What must I do to be saved? The ministers of the gospel point out to him Jesus Christ, as the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

10. This certainly was a genuine copy of the Divine law; and probably the *autograph* of Moses, as it is said in the parallel place of Chronicles to be the book of the *law of the Lord by Moses*. It is not probable that this was the *only* copy of the law in the land, or that Josiah had never before seen the book of Moses; but the fact seems to be, that this was the original of the covenant renewed by Moses in the plains of Moab, and now, being unexpectedly found, its *antiquity*, the *occasion* of its being made, the *present circumstances* of the people, the *imperfect state* in which the reformation was as yet, after all that had been done, would all concur to produce the effect here mentioned on the mind of the pious Josiah.—*Greenfield*.

Ver. 11—20. *Josiah consults Huldah the prophetess.*

The book of the law is not laid up in the king's cabinet as a mere rarity to be admired, but it is read before the king. Those put the truest honour upon their bibles, who study them, and converse with them; daily feed on that bread, and walk by that light; men of honour and business must look upon an acquaintance with God's word to be their best business and honour.

Josiah rent his clothes, as ashamed of the sin of his people, and afraid of the wrath of God. He had long thought the case of his kingdom bad, but he never thought it so bad as he perceived it to be, by the book of the law read to him. The inquiry he made hereupon, was, What course shall we take to turn away God's wrath, to prevent the judgments which our sins have deserved. Convictions of sin and wrath should put us upon this inquiry, What shall we do to be saved? If ye will thus inquire, inquire quickly, before it be too late. Also what we may expect, and must provide for. If this be the rule of right, certainly our

fathers have been much in the wrong. Now that the commandment came, sin revived, and appeared sin. In the glass of the law, he saw the sins of his people more numerous than he had before seen them, and more exceeding sinful. He infers hence certainly, Great is the wrath that is kindled against us. Those who are truly apprehensive of the weight of God's wrath, cannot but be very anxious how they may be saved.

This inquiry Josiah sent to Huldah the prophetess. The spirit of prophecy, that inestimable treasure, was sometimes put, not only into earthen vessels, but into the weaker vessels, that the excellency of the power might be of God. Miriam had helped to lead Israel out of Egypt, Mic. 6. 4. Deborah judged them, and now Huldah instructed them in the mind of God; and her being a wife, was no prejudice to her being a prophetess; marriage is honourable in all. It was mercy to Jerusalem, that when bibles were scarce, they had prophets; as that, afterward, when prophecy ceased, they had more bibles; for God never leaves himself without witness, because he will leave sinners without excuse. She was near, for she dwelt at Jerusalem, in a place called Mishneh, the second rank of buildings from the royal palace. Happy the court that had a prophetess within the verge of it, and knew how to value her. Huldah let Josiah know what judgments God had in store for Judah and Jerusalem. His wrath shall be kindled against this place; and what is hell itself, but the fire of God's wrath kindled against sinners. The decree is gone forth, the iniquity of Jerusalem shall not be purged with sacrifice or offering. God will be found as terrible to impenitent sinners, as his word makes him to be. She also lets him know what mercy God has in store for him; Thine heart was tender. The generality of the people were hardened, and their hearts unhumbled, but Josiah's heart was tender; he was afraid of the judgments of God, which he saw coming upon Jerusalem, and earnestly deprecated them. This is tenderness of heart, and thus he humbled himself before the Lord. Those who most fear God's wrath, are least likely to feel it. A reprieve is granted till after his death; I will gather thee to thy fathers. The saints, then, had a comfortable prospect of happiness on the other side death, else, being ga-

thered to their fathers, would not have been so often made the matter of a promise as we find it was. When the righteous is taken away from the evil to come, he enters into peace, Isa. 57. 1, 2. And though Josiah was mortally wounded in battle, yet he died in peace with God, and went to glory. A humble consciousness of having deserved wrath, and an earnest application to the Lord for mercy in his appointed way, accompany salvation, and never will be rejected of our gracious God. Whatever such persons suffer or witness, they are gathered to the grave in peace, and shall enter into the rest reserved for the people of God.

(*Read here 2 Chron. 34.*)

CHAPTER XXIII.

Ver. 1—3. *Josiah reads the law, and renews the covenant.*

Josiah had received a message from God, that there was no preventing the ruin of Jerusalem, but that he should only deliver his own soul; yet he will do his duty, and then leave the event to God. Nothing ought to discourage our endeavours to promote the revival of true godliness. If declining churches and nations cannot be rescued from judgment, yet a few may be snatched as brands from the burning. If any thing prevent threatened ruin, it must be reformation. He ordered the book of the law to be read to the people; he read it himself, was much affected with it, and desirous the people should be so too. It is really the interest of princes to promote the knowledge of the scriptures in their dominions. If the people are as stedfastly resolved to obey the law, as he is to govern by law, the kingdom will be happy; all people are concerned to know the scripture, and all in authority to spread the knowledge of it. He engaged them in the most solemn manner to abolish idolatry, and to serve God in righteousness and true holiness. Though most were formal or hypocritical herein, yet much outward wickedness would be prevented, and they were accountable to God for their own conduct.

Ver. 4—14. *Josiah destroys idolatry.*

What abundance of wickedness in Judah and Jerusalem! One would not have believed it possible that in Judah, where God was known, in Israel, where his name was great, in Salem, in Sion, where his dwelling-place was, such abominations

should be found. Josiah had reigned eighteen years, and had himself set the people a good example, and kept up religion according to law; yet, when he came to make inquisition for idolatry, the depth and extent are almost incredible. Even in the house of the Lord were found all manner of utensils for the worship of Baal, and of the grove, (or Ashtaroth,) and of all the host of heaven. Even an image was yet standing in the temple; some think it the image of Venus, the same with Ashtaroth. Hard by the house of the Lord were houses where all manner of wickedness was practised under pretence of religion, in honour of their impure deities. There were many idolatrous altars found. There was Tophet, very near Jerusalem, where was the image of Moloch, to which some sacrificed their children, burning them in the fire. There were high-places before Jerusalem, which Solomon had built. They that introduce corruptions into religion, know not how far they will reach, nor how long they will last.

There were idolatrous priests, that officiated at those idolatrous altars. Chemarim, black men, or that wore black: see Zeph. 1. 4. They that sacrificed to Osiris, or that wept for Tammuz, Ezek. 8. 14, or that worshipped the infernal deities, put on black garments as mourners. Good Josiah made a full destruction of all those relics of idolatry; such was his zeal for the Lord of hosts, and his holy indignation against all that is displeasing to Him. The law was, that the monuments of the canaanites' idolatry must be all destroyed, Deut. 7. 5, much more the idolatry of the israelites, in whom it was more impious, profane, and perfidious. Those idolatrous priests that were not of the house of Aaron, or had sacrificed to false gods, he put to death, according to the law. The descendants from Aaron that had burnt incense in high places, but to the true God only, he forbade ever to approach the altar of the Lord, they had forfeited that honour. He brought them out of the cities of Judah, that they might not do mischief in the country by secretly keeping up idolatrous usages; but he allowed them to eat of the unleavened bread, the bread of the meat-offering, Lev. 2. 4, 5, among their brethren, with whom they were to reside in Jerusalem, that they might be kept from doing hurt, and taught to do well.

The scripture history presents to our view a mortifying picture of the blindness of man's mind, the perverseness of his will, and the depravity of his affections. But if the records of Greece and Rome were presented to our view as a plain detail of facts, if the conduct of those nations, in public and private life, were compared with the holy law of God, would not their idolatries and immoralities be found greatly to exceed those of the israelites? Do not all the praises bestowed upon them arise from man's disposition to call good evil, and evil good; to put darkness for light, and light for darkness? Isa. 5. 20. Pride, ambition, cruelty, and revenge have been lauded by poets and historians; idolatry and the most abominable wickednesses have been excused, if not vindicated. The conclusion from profane history, as from the records of God's word, is, that all the real godliness or goodness ever found on earth, has been derived from the new-creating Spirit of Jesus Christ.

10. The narrow valley of Hinnom or Gehenna, is to the south of Jerusalem. Here the idolatrous worship of Moloch was practised by passing children through a fire, and sometimes by burning them alive. To drown their shrieks musical instruments (termed taph, a sort of drum) were played, whence the place was named Tophet. The jews after the captivity, abhorred this spot on account of the cruel idolatry practised there, and threw into it all sorts of filth, the carcasses of animals, and the bodies of malefactors. To prevent noxious effects from such a mass of corruption, fires were constantly kept up in the valley. Hence the appellation is applied, Matt. 5. 22, to signify the place of everlasting punishment.

Ver. 15—24. *The reformation extended to Israel.—A passover kept.*

Josiah's zeal extended to the cities of Israel within his reach. The ten tribes were carried captive, but the assyrian colonies did not fully people the country; so that, it is likely, many cities had put themselves under the protection of the kings of Judah, 2 Chron. 30. 1; 34. 6. These he visited, to carry on his reformation. Perhaps he had authority there by a grant from the king of Assyria. He defiled and demolished Jeroboam's altar at Bethel, with the high-place. Josiah spied the sepulchres in the mount; these he opened, and burnt the bones upon the altar, and made it odious. This, as it was Josiah's act, seems to be the result of a very sudden resolve; he had not done it, but that he happened to turn and espy the sepulchres, yet it was foretold above 350 years before, when this altar was first built by Jeroboam, 1 Kings 13. 2. In that

prophecy the name of Josiah was particularly recorded; but so wicked a man as his father could have had no such intention in giving his son this name. He destroyed all the houses of the high-places, all those synagogues of Satan that were in the cities of Samaria; the priests he justly made sacrifices upon their own altars. He carefully preserved the sepulchre of that man of God, who came from Judah to foretell this.

When they had cleared the country of the old leaven, then they applied themselves to the keeping of the feast. Josiah considered that we must learn to do well, and not only cease to do evil; and that the way to keep out all abominable customs, is to keep up all instituted ordinances; see Lev. 18. 30. Therefore he commanded all the people to keep the passover, which was not only a memorial of their deliverance out of Egypt, but a token of their dedication to Him that brought them out, and of their communion with Him; this he found written in the book of the law, here called the book of the covenant. There was not holden such a passover in any of the foregoing reigns, no not from the days of the judges, which intimates that there were then some golden days. This passover was extraordinary for the number and devotion of the communicants, their sacrifices and offerings, and their exact observance of the laws of the feast; and it was not now, as in Hezekiah's passover, when many communicated who were not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary, and the levites were permitted to do the priests' work. We have reason to think that during the remainder of Josiah's reign, religion flourished; but in this passover the reformation, and the revival of a long neglected ordinance, put them into transports of holy joy; and God recompensed their zeal in destroying idolatry with uncommon tokens of his presence and favour: this made it a distinguished passover.

(*Read here 2 Chron. 35. 1—19.*)

16. After the words, "The man of God proclaimed," the greek version has,—“when Jeroboam stood by the altar at the feast. And, turning about, he cast his eyes on the sepulchre of the man of God who proclaimed these words.”

Ver. 25—30. *God's just wrath against Judah—Josiah slain by Pharaoh-nechoh at Megiddo.*

Upon reading these verses, we must say, Lord, though thy righteousness be as the great mountains, evident, conspicu-

ous, and past dispute, yet thy judgments are a great deep, unfathomable, and past finding out, Psa. 36. 6. It is here expressed that Josiah was one of the best kings that ever sat upon the throne of David. Hezekiah excelled all the kings of Judah for entire confidence in God; and Josiah in zeal for reformation, and an unblemished life. He turned to the Lord from whom his fathers had revolted. It is true religion to turn to God as one we have chosen and love. He did what he could to turn his kingdom also to the Lord. He did this with his heart and soul; his affections and aims were right in what he did. Those make nothing of their religion, who do not make heart-work of it. What great things may we bring to pass in the service of God, if we are but lively and hearty in it! He did this in exact observance of the law.

Notwithstanding all this, the Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath. That is certainly true, which God spake by the prophet, Jer. 18. 7, 8, that if a nation, doomed to destruction, turn from the evil of sin, God will repent of the evil of punishment; therefore we must conclude that Josiah's people, though they submitted to Josiah's power, did not heartily imbibe Josiah's principles. They did not voluntarily turn from their evil way, but still continued their affection for idols; and therefore he that knows men's hearts, would not recall the sentence. As an evidence of this, even the reforming king is cut off in the midst of his usefulness, in mercy to him, that he might not see the evil which was coming upon his kingdom; but in wrath to his people, for his death was an inlet to their desolations. The king of Egypt waged war with the king of Assyria, so the king of Babylon is now called. Josiah's kingdom lay between them; he thought himself concerned to oppose the king of Egypt; he therefore went against him, but was killed in the first engagement. Here we cannot justify Josiah's conduct; he had no clear call to engage in this war, nor do we find that he asked counsel of God concerning it. The people greatly lamented his death, 2 Chron. 35. 25, urged to it by Jeremiah, who told them the meaning of it; they had not made a due improvement of the mercies they enjoyed by his life, of which God taught them the worth by the want.

(*Read here 2 Chron. 35. 20—27.*)

25. This verse is not a contradiction of the

statement, 2 Kings 18. 5, which was written prior to this record of Josiah.

29. The defeat of Josiah at Megiddo is confirmed by statements in Herodotus, and also by sculptures discovered by Belzoni in the tomb of Psammis, the son of Pharaoh-nechoh.

—*E. D. Clarke* says, This plain, called by way of eminence, The great plain, in scripture, and elsewhere, The great plain or field of Esdraelon, The field of Megiddon, The galilean plain, we found one vast meadow, covered with the richest verdure. It has been a chosen place for encampment in every contest carried on in this country, from the days of Nebuchodonozor king of Assyria, unto the disastrous march of Napoleon Bonaparte from Egypt unto Syria. Jews, gentiles, saracens, christian crusaders, and anti-christian frenchmen, egyptians, persians, druses, turks, and arabs, warriors of every nation that is under heaven, have pitched their tents on the plain of Esdraelon, and have beheld the banners of their nation wet with the dew of Tabor and Hermon.

Rae Wilson also visited this plain, and says, It is altogether impossible for language to convey an idea of the grandeur of this vast plain, where on the right hand stands, in indescribable majesty, mount Tabor, which is among, yet still separate from, other mountains, and one of them is the lofty Hermon. In all ages it appears to have been distinguished as a theatre for local war. The sacred historian recounts that it was on this spot the hosts of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword before Barak, who came down upon them like a torrent from Tabor with an overwhelming army. Here also the memorable contest took place in which Josiah fell, the event which occasioned such scenes of national mourning: and here also Nebuchadnezzar encamped with his overwhelming force, when waging dreadful warfare against the nations in revenge for their having resolutely refused to idolize him. In the course of my travels in Europe, I have walked over Leipsic, Racknitz, Botrun, Vittoria, Waterloo, and other fields where sanguinary contests have been waged, but I am persuaded the great plain of Esdraelon exceeds any one of them in extent.

Ver. 31—37. *Wicked reigns of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim in Judah.*

After Josiah was laid in his grave one trouble came upon another, till within twenty-two years, Jerusalem was destroyed. If Josiah's sons had trodden in his steps, they would have fared the better for his piety; but, deviating from them, they fared the worse for his rashness. We need not wonder that the righteousness of Josiah, and the few pious persons among them, did not prevent the punishment of an impenitent nation, for even the Saviour's meritorious obedience unto death will not profit one finally impenitent sinner. Yet the desolation of Jerusalem proved like the crisis of a disease; while the wicked perished in great numbers, the remnant was purified, and Josiah's reformation raised up some to join the few who proved the precious seed of their future church and nation.

Jehoahaz, a younger son, was first made

king by the people of the land. He was but three months a prince, and was then made a prisoner, and lived and died so. The king of Egypt carried him to Egypt, where he died soon after. This Jehoahaz is that young lion whom Ezekiel speaks of in his lamentation for the princes of Israel, that learned to catch the prey, and devour men, (he did evil in the sight of the Lord,) but the nations heard of him; he was taken in their pit, and they brought him with chains into Egypt, Ezek. 19. 1—4: see Jer. 22. 10—12.

Of Jehoiakim we are here told that the king of Egypt exacted from him a vast tribute. But notwithstanding the rebukes of Providence he was under, he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and so prepared against himself greater judgments; such God will send, if lesser do not the work. A little time and slender abilities often suffice to undo the good which pious men, with unremitting endeavours, have, for a course of years, been labouring to effect. But, blessed be God, the good work which he begins by his regenerating Spirit, cannot be disannulled, but, notwithstanding all changes and temptations, shall be perfected unto the day of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Ver. 1—7. *Jehoiakim's wicked reign—He is subdued by Nebuchadnezzar.*

We have here the first mention of a name which makes a great figure both in the histories and in the prophecies of the Old Testament; it is that of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. When Nebuchadnezzar had obtained great advantages against the Egyptians, on his return he attacked Jehoiakim as an ally of Necho, and put him in chains to carry him to Babylon, but, upon his submission, released him. He carried away part of the gold and silver vessels of the temple, and some of the most considerable persons of the land. This is the first epoch or period for the commencement of the seventy years of the Babylonish captivity, 2 Chron. 36. 6, 7; Dan. 1. 1—7.

Jehoiakim served the king of Babylon about three years, but then rebelled, in hopes of assistance from the king of Egypt. If Jehoiakim had served his God as he should have done, he had not been servant to the king of Babylon. If he had been content with his servitude, and true to his word, his condition had

been no worse; but, rebelling against Babylon, he plunged himself into more trouble. When he rebelled, Nebuchadnezzar sent his forces to destroy his country. No mention is here made of their commission from the king of Babylon, but only of that from the King of kings. Many are serving God's purposes who are not aware of it. Though Manasseh repented, and even the persecutions and murders of which he was guilty were pardoned, so that he was delivered from the wrath to come, yet as they were national sins, they lay charged upon the land. Some were then living who were aiding and abetting; and the present king was guilty of innocent blood, as appears, Jer. 22. 17. See what need nations have to lament the sins of their fathers, lest they smart for them. Threatenings will be fulfilled as certainly as promises, if the sinner's repentance prevent not. The king of Egypt was likewise subdued by the king of Babylon. Lately he had oppressed Israel, ch. 23. 33; now he is himself brought down. Afterward he attempted to give Zedekiah relief, but was obliged to retire, Jer. 37. 7. Jehoiakim, seeing his country laid waste, and himself ready to fall into the enemy's hand, as it seems, died of a broken heart, in the midst of his days; or perhaps was slain in a sally against the bands mentioned ver. 2, and his body left unburied, or treated with disgrace. Jehoiakim slept with his fathers; but it is not said that he was buried with them; no doubt the prophecy was fulfilled, that he should not be lamented, as his father, but buried with the burial of an ass, Jer. 22. 18, 19, his dead body cast out, Jer. 36. 30.

Ver. 8—20. *Jehoiachin carried captive to Babylon—Zedekiah made king.*

Jehoiachin reigned but three months, yet long enough to show that he justly smarted for his fathers' sins, for he trod in their steps. Jerusalem was besieged by the king of Babylon. Now the word of God was fulfilled, Deut. 28. 49, &c. Jehoiachin immediately surrendered. Had he sought peace with God, and taken the method Hezekiah did in the like case, he needed not to have feared the king of Babylon; but he and his royal family, his servants and princes, delivered themselves up prisoners of war; this was the consequence of their being servants of sin. Nebuchadnezzar rifled the treasures both of the temple and of the state. These

were the vessels which the false prophets flattered the people would be returned, Jer. 27. 16. But Jeremiah told them that the rest would go after them, and they did so, Dan. 5. 3. Nebuchadnezzar carried great part of Jerusalem into captivity. This forms a second epoch to be regarded in computing the captivity. The young king continued a close prisoner for thirty-seven years. In this captivity, Ezekiel the prophet was carried away, Ezek. 1. 1, 2, and Mordecai, Esth. 2. 6. This Jehoiachin was also called Jeconiah, 1 Chron. 3. 16, and, in contempt, Coniah, Jer. 22. 24, where his captivity is foretold.

God had written Jehoiachin childless, Jer. 22. 30, and his uncle was intrusted with the government. This Zedekiah was the last of the kings of Judah: the name which the king of Babylon gave him signifies, The justice of the Lord, a presage of the glorifying God's justice in his ruin. Though the judgments of God upon his three predecessors might have been a warning to him, he did that which was evil, like them. See how impolitic he was; he rebelled against the king of Babylon, whose tributary he was, and with whom he was utterly unable to contend. This came to pass through the anger of the Lord, that he might cast Judah out from his presence. When those intrusted with the counsels of a nation act unwisely, and against their true interest, we ought to notice the displeasure of God in it. It is for the sins of a people that God removes the speech of the trusty, takes away the understanding of the aged, and hides from them the things that belong to the public peace. And in fulfilling the prophecies of his word, or the secret purposes of his justice, the Lord need only to leave men to the blindness of their own minds, or to the lusts of their own hearts. The gradual approach of Divine judgments affords sinners space for repentance, and believers leisure to prepare for properly meeting the calamity, while it evidences the hardness and obstinacy of those who will not forsake their sins. Let us, in these awful events, contemplate the truth of God's word, and flee from the wrath to come. Let us embrace and plead his precious promises, and by patient continuance in well doing, wait for the Saviour's mercy unto eternal life.

(See 2 Chron. 36. 1—11.)

CHAPTER XXV.

Ver. 1—7. *Jerusalem besieged—Zedekiah taken, his sons slain, his eyes put out.*

Here is an account of the fatal consequences of Zedekiah's rebellion against the king of Babylon. Jerusalem was so fortified by nature and art, that it could not be taken till famine rendered the besieged unable to make further resistance. In the prophecy and Lamentations of Jeremiah, we find more of the circumstances of this event; here it suffices to observe, that the obstinacy, impiety, and misery of the besieged were almost unparalleled. The siege of Jerusalem lasted two years. At first the chaldean army retired, for fear of the king of Egypt, Jer. 37. 11; but they soon returned, not to quit the city till they had made themselves masters of it. During this siege famine prevailed, so that, for a long time, they ate their bread by weight, and with care, Ezek. 4. 16. At length there was no bread for the people of the land; now they ate their own children for want of food: see this foretold by one prophet, Ezek. 5. 10, and bewailed by another, Lam. 4. 3. Jeremiah earnestly persuaded the king to surrender, Jer. 38. 17; but his heart was hardened to his destruction. At length the city was taken by storm. The king, his family, and his great men escaped in the night, by secret passages. But those deceive themselves who think to escape God's judgments, as much as those who think to brave them. The feet of him that flees from them will as surely fail as the hands of him that fights against them; when God judges, he will overcome. Intelligence was given to the chaldeans of the king's flight, and they soon overtook him. His guards were scattered from him, every man shifting for his own safety. Had he put himself under God's protection, that would not have failed him, Jer. 38. 17. He was brought to the king of Babylon. His sons were slain before his eyes, that this doleful spectacle, the last his eyes beheld, might leave an impression of grief and horror upon his spirit as long as he lived. His eyes were put out, by which he was deprived of that common comfort of human life, the light of the sun; he was also disabled for any service. He dreaded being mocked, and therefore would not be persuaded to yield, Jer. 38. 19; but that which he feared came upon him, and

added much to his misery. By this, two prophecies, that seemed contradictory, were both fulfilled. Jeremiah prophesied that Zedekiah should be brought to Babylon, Jer. 32. 5; 34. 3. Ezekiel prophesied that he should not see Babylon, Ezek. 12. 13. He was brought thither, but his eyes being put out, he did not see it. Being a prince, he was bound with fetters of brass; the metal was somewhat nobler and lighter, but that was little comfort. Let it not seem strange, if those that have been held in the cords of iniquity, come to be thus held in the cords of affliction, Job 36. 8.

2. Jeremiah 21. 24. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 37. 38. 39. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. should be read in connexion with this history of the siege of Jerusalem.

Ver. 8—21. *The temple burnt—The treasures carried away—The people carried into captivity, excepting a few of the poorer sort.*

About a month after the assyrians had taken the city, Nebuzaradan was sent with orders to complete the destruction of Jerusalem; their hearts, for aught that appears, were still hardened, and therefore execution is awarded to the utmost. The city and temple were burnt, and, it is probable, the ark in it. By this God showed how little he cares for the outward pomp of his worship when the life and power of religion are neglected. The people trusted to the temple, as if that would protect them in their sins, Jer. 7. 4; but God, by this, lets them know that when they had profaned it, they would find it but a refuge of lies. This temple stood but about 420 years; the people having forfeited the promises made concerning it: those promises must be understood of the gospel temple, which is God's rest for ever. The second temple was burnt by the romans, the same month, and the same day of the month that the first temple was burnt by the chaldeans.

The walls of Jerusalem were demolished, and the residue of the people carried away captive to Babylon. This forms the third epoch to be regarded in calculating the duration of the captivity. The small numbers mentioned in the accounts of these events lead us to reflect on the multitudes which must have previously perished; very few, making in all but 832 persons, (see Jer. 52. 29,) were now carried into captivity; yet only the poor were left behind to till the ground for the chaldeans. Sometimes poverty is a pro-

tection; they that have nothing have nothing to lose. When the rich jews, who had been oppressive to the poor, were made strangers, nay prisoners, in an enemy's country, the poor, whom they had despised and oppressed, had liberty and peace in their own country. Providence sometimes remarkably humbles the proud and favours them of low degree.

The brazen vessels and other appurtenances of the temple are carried away; those of silver and gold most of them were gone before. When the things signified were sinned away, what should the signs stand there for? It was righteous with God to deprive those of the benefit of his worship, who had preferred false worships before it; they that would have many altars, now shall have none.

Several of the great men are slain in cold blood. These the king of Babylon's regency looked upon as most active in opposing him; but Divine justice, we may suppose, looked upon them as ringleaders in idolatry and impiety. This completed the calamity: so Judah was carried away out of their land, about 860 years after they were put in possession of it by Joshua. Now the scripture was fulfilled, The Lord shall bring thee, and the king which thou shalt set over thee, into a nation thou hast not known, Deut. 28. 36. Sin kept their fathers forty years out of Canaan, and now turned them out. The Lord is known by the judgments he executes, and makes good the word he has spoken, Amos 3. 2, You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. And if rebellion against earthly princes deserves such severe penalties as in all ages and nations have been inflicted, who can estimate what or how much punishment, our rebellion against our Creator, Benefactor, and Sovereign deserves? As the Lord spared not the angels that sinned; as he hath doomed the whole race of fallen men to the grave, and all unbelievers to hell; and as he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, we need not wonder at any desolation or miseries he may see good to bring upon guilty nations, churches, or individual persons.

Ver. 22—30. *Gedaliah slain; the rest of the jews flee into Egypt—Evil-merodach relieves the captivity of Jehoiachin.*

In these verses we have the dispersion of the remaining people of the land of

Judah. The king of Babylon appointed Gedaliah, one of themselves, a good man, to be their governor and protector. His father Ahikam countenanced and protected Jeremiah, Jer. 26. 24. He resided at Mizpah, in Benjamin, a place famous in Samuel's time; thither those came who fled from Zedekiah, and put themselves under his protection, of which he assured them, if they would be patient and peaceable under the government of the king of Babylon. Gedaliah, though he had not the pomp and power of a sovereign, yet might have been a great blessing to them, especially having such a counsellor as Jeremiah. Yet this hopeful settlement is destroyed by themselves. The things of their peace were so hidden from their eyes, that they knew not when they were well off, nor would believe when they were told. Ishmael, who was of the royal family, envying Gedaliah, and the happy settlement of the people under him, though he could not propose to set up himself, basely slew him and all his friends, both jews and chaldees. Nebuchadnezzar could not have been a more mischievous enemy to their peace, than this degenerate branch of the house of David. They were as yet in their own good land, but they forsook it. We may suppose that those who were innocent, nay, who suffered greatly by this event, would not have been punished for it. But, contrary to the counsel of Jeremiah, they all went to Egypt. Thus was a full end made of them by their own folly and disobedience, and Egypt had the last of them, that the last verse of that chapter of threatenings might be fulfilled, after all the rest, Deut. 28. 68, The Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again. These events are more largely related by the prophet Jeremiah, ch. 40. to ch. 45. who witnessed them.

Of Zedekiah we hear no more after he was carried blind to Babylon; it is probable that he did not live long, but that when he died he was buried with some marks of honour, Jer. 34. 5. Of Jehoiachin, or Jeconiah, who surrendered himself, ch. 24. 12, we are told, that when Evil-merodach came to the crown, he released him out of prison, where he had lain thirty-seven years, and was now fifty-five years old, spake kindly to him, paid more respect to him than to any other of the kings his father had left in captivity,

gave him princely clothing instead of his prison-garments, and maintained him in his own palace as long as he lived. Consider this as a very happy change of Jehoiachin's condition. Let none say that they shall never see good again, because they have long seen little but evil: the most miserable know not what blessed turn Providence may yet give to their affairs, nor what comforts they are reserved for, according to the days wherein they have been afflicted, Psa. 90. 15. Also it was a kind dispensation of Providence, for the encouragement of the jews in captivity, and the support of their faith and hope; this happened about the middle of their captivity; and to see their king thus advanced, would be a comfortable earnest to them of their own release in due time, in the set time. Unto the upright there thus ariseth light in the darkness, to encourage them to hope, even in the cloudy and dark day, that at evening time it shall be light: when therefore we are perplexed, let us not despair. No state of misery on earth can be called absolutely helpless or comfortless. During our darkest nights of adversity in this world, we may hope for the dawning of prosperous days, especially if our afflictions lead us to repentance, for God hath all hearts in his hands, and can incline them to kindness.

The believer in this world is, as it were, imprisoned with sins, temptations, and tribulations many a tedious year; but death, as the servant of Christ, comes for his enlargement. Then the prison-door is opened, his fetters are loosed, his prison-garments are changed for robes of salvation and glory, and he shall feast for ever on the fulness of joy which is to be found in the presence and favour of Almighty God. Even in this world the Saviour brings to the trembling and distressed sinner who seeks him, a blessed release from condemnation and bondage, bestowing earnest and foretastes of the pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore. Sin alone can hurt us; Jesus alone can do good to sinners. May God help us to believe, that we may now enter into rest and liberty, in his favour and service; and wait in patient hope for the blessed season, when, being more than conquerors by his grace, we shall sit with the Saviour upon his throne.

(See 2 Chron. 36. 11—21.)

THE BOOKS OF CHRONICLES.

The books of Chronicles were probably penned by Ezra, or some later writer, after the babylonish captivity; they appear to consist of extracts from the public records of the jews, with suitable reflections. They are in a great measure repetition, yet we could very ill spare them, for there are some excellent useful things in them which we find not elsewhere. The ancient jews comprised the two books of Chronicles in one book. These books are called in the hebrew, Words of days, that is, journals, or annals, because, by Divine direction, collected out of public and authentic records; and a few names must have been added to the genealogies after the death of Ezra. Some suppose the genealogical tables to have been prefixed by Simon the just. The collection was made after the captivity, yet the language of the originals, written before, is sometimes retained, as 2 Chron. 5. 9, "There it is unto this day," which must have been written before the destruction of the temple. The septuagint calls the Chronicles a book of "things left," or overlooked by the preceding historians. The appellation of Chronicles was given to these books by Jerome, because they contain an abstract, in order of time, of the whole of sacred history, to the time when they were written. It is certain they are not the original records or memorials of the sovereigns of Israel and Judah, often referred to in the books of Kings. Those ancient registers were more copious than the Chronicles.

The authenticity of these books is abundantly supported by the general mass of external evidence, by which their Divine authority is fully established, as also by the indirect attestation of our Lord and his apostles. A principal scope of these books is to exhibit the genealogies, the rank, the functions, and the order of the priests and levites; that after the captivity they might the more easily re-enter on their ministry. Also to show how the lands had been distributed among the families, that the respective tribes might on their return, obtain, as far as was practicable, the ancient inheritance of their fathers. The *First Book* traces the rise and propagation of the jewish people from Adam, and afterwards gives a circumstantial account of the reign and transactions of David. In the *Second Book* the narrative is continued, and relates the progress and dissolution of the kingdom of Judah; also it notices the return of the jews from the babylonish captivity. The period embraced is about 3468 years. Jerome says, that whosoever supposes himself to have knowledge of the scriptures without being acquainted with the books of Chronicles, deceives himself. Historical facts passed over in the books of Kings, names, and the connexion of passages are to be found here, and many questions concerning the gospel are explained.

Three things are herein to be considered. 1. That godly kings, when they saw plagues prepared against their country for sin, had recourse to the Lord, and by earnest prayer were heard. 2. That it greatly offendeth God, that such as fear him and profess his religion, should join in amity with the wicked. 3. That good rulers ever loved the prophets of God, and were very zealous to set forth his religion; contrariwise, the wicked hated and persecuted his ministers, set up idolatry, and served gods according to the fantasy of men.

THE FIRST BOOK OF CHRONICLES.

CHAPTER I.

Genealogies.

THIS chapter, and many that follow, repeat the genealogies in the sacred history, and put them together, with considerable additions. When compared with other parallel places, there are differences found; yet we must not therefore stumble at the word, but bless God that the things necessary to salvation are plain enough. And since the wise God has thought fit to write these things to us, we should not pass them over unread. All scripture is profitable, though not all alike profitable; and we may take occasion for good thoughts and meditations, even from those parts of scripture that do not abound so much with profitable remarks as other parts. These genealogies were of great use, when here preserved, and put into the hands of the jews after their return from Babylon; for in that dispersion and

despair, they would be in danger of losing the distinctions of their tribes and families. They are still of use for illustrating the scripture history, especially that it might appear our blessed Saviour was, according to the prophecies of him, the son of David, the son of Judah, the son of Abraham, the son of Adam. And now that He is come, for whose sake these registers were preserved, the jews have so lost all their genealogies, that even that of the priests, the most sacred of all, is now forgotten, and they know not of any one man in the world that can prove himself of the house of Aaron. When the building is reared, the scaffolds are removed. When the promised Seed is come, the line that was to lead to him is broken off.

The original of the jewish nation is here traced from the first man that God created, and is thereby distinguished from the obscure, fabulous, and absurd origins

assigned to other nations. A general view is then given of the peopling the earth by the sons of Noah, which intimates that we are all of one blood and nature. The genealogy is traced forward to Abraham, the ancestor of the promised Seed, and the father of the faithful.

Ver. 1—27. *Adam to Abraham.*

This paragraph has Adam for its first word, and Abraham for its last. Between the creation of the former, and the birth of the latter, were 2000 years; almost the one half of which time Adam himself lived. Adam was the common father of our flesh, Abraham the common father of the faithful. By the breach which the former made of the covenant of innocence, we were all made miserable; by the covenant of grace made with the latter, we all are, or may be made happy. We all are, by nature, the seed of Adam, branches of that wild olive. Let us see to it, that by faith, we become the seed of Abraham, Rom. 4. 11, 12—that we are planted into the good olive, and partake of its root and fatness.

The nations now are all so mingled with one another, that no one nation, nor the greatest part of any, is descended entirely from any of these fountains. Only this we are sure of, that God has created of one blood all nations of men; they are all descended from one Adam, and Noah. Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Mal. 2. 10.

7. The names here and afterwards ending in *im*, which is the plural number in hebrew, are not the names of individual persons, but of nations.

Ver. 28—54. *The descendants of Abraham.*

The genealogy is from hence confined to the posterity of Abraham. The other branches of his family are briefly spoken of, and then the sacred penman proceeds to the chosen people, and to the line of the Saviour; in comparison with whom all nations that have been most renowned for arts and arms are entirely disregarded. As we are all descended from one man, so we all resemble and imitate him by whom sin and death entered into the world. This should remind us how vile and frail we are, and excite us to exercise repentance, to value the Saviour, to despair of happiness from and in this world, to seek those things which are above, and constantly to prepare for death.

Let us take occasion from the reading of these genealogies, to think of the multitudes that have gone through this world,

have acted their parts in it, and then quitted it. Job, even in his early day, saw not only every man drawing after him, but innumerable before him, Job 21. 33. All these, and all theirs, had their day; many of them made a mighty noise and figure in the world; but their day came to fall, and their place knew them no more. The paths of death are trodden paths. None can retrace their steps. Let us also think of the providence of God, which keeps up the generations of men, and so preserves that degenerate race, though guilty and obnoxious, in being upon earth. How easily could he cut it off! Write but all the children of men childless, as some are, and, in a few years, the earth would be eased of its burden under which it groans; but the Divine patience lets the trees that cumber the ground, not only grow, but propagate. As one generation even of sinful men passes away, another comes, Eccl. 1. 4; Numb. 32. 14, and will do so while the earth remains. Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it.

While we are spared, we should regard every human being as a brother, a fellow-sinner, and a fellow-sufferer, without respect to climate, nation, or party. With expanded benevolence and compassion, we should aim to ~~promote peace, and to be instrumental~~ to the salvation of men. Short is our passage through time into eternity. May we be distinguished as the Lord's people, whom he delighteth to honour and bless. This good part is freely bestowed by the Saviour upon all who prefer it to earthly distinctions, and are made willing to deny themselves and bear their cross for the sake of it; and it shall never be taken away from them that choose it. The multitudes that have peopled or shall people the earth, shall be assembled before the judgment-seat of Christ. These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. May we then give diligence to be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.

36. The greek version and the arabic read, "Timna also, who was the concubine of Eliphaz, bare him Amalek:" see Gen. 36. 12. Several difficulties in these genealogies have arisen from errors or omissions in transcribing.

38. Ezar is Ezer, Gen. 36. 30. Here the difference arises from the translators, the words in the original being the same. This is another source of discrepancies in the english and other versions.

40. Alian, Gen. 36. 23, Alvan. The difference here is caused by the change of one letter for

another, which closely resemble each other in form.

The above instances will suffice to show the english reader the manner in which many different readings and apparent contradictions in scripture have arisen, particularly in this and the following chapter; he will perceive that they are of no moment except as matters of criticism. In some cases, as Chileab, 2 Sam. 3. 3, and Daniel, ch. 3. 1, the person probably had two names, and in others the pronunciation might be altered. We know that changes occur in every language during an interval of several hundred years. Grandsons also are mentioned as sons. The marginal readings remove many of the difficulties.

CHAPTER II.

Genealogies.

We are now come to the register of the children of Israel, that distinguished people, that were to dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations. The persons mentioned in the first seventeen verses, are most of them such as we read of in other scriptures. But very few of the rest are mentioned any where else. It should seem the tribe of Judah were more full and exact in their genealogies than any other of the tribes; in which we must acknowledge a special providence, for the clearing of the genealogy of Christ.

Here are some that are said to be families of scribes, ver. 55, such as kept up ~~learning in their families~~, especially scripture learning, and taught the people the good knowledge of God. Among all these great families we are glad to find some that were families of scribes. Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets! All the families of Israel families of scribes, well-instructed to the kingdom of heaven, and able to bring out of their treasury things new and old!

No length of time will blot from remembrance the guilt or infamy of those who do evil in the sight of the Lord. But as the Saviour was pleased to assume human nature by descent through so many notorious transgressors, and thus to be made in the likeness of sinful flesh, as well as a sacrifice for sin, all manner of wickedness shall be purged away from those who believe in his name.

In his wise, righteous, merciful sovereignty, the Lord advances or depresses the branches of families, prospers or crosses our temporal pursuits, replenishes or diminishes our households, and renders them a comfort or a trial to us. Submission to God's will is our duty and wisdom; but it is the privilege of the

true believer alone, to maintain this happy frame of mind. In Christ all are welcome to his salvation who come to him; all have equal privileges in proportion to their faith in him, their love and devotedness to him. All that is truly valuable consists in the favour, peace, and image of God; and a life spent to his glory, in promoting the welfare of our fellow-creatures.

CHAPTER III.

Genealogies.

Of all the families of Israel, none were so illustrious as the family of David: Here we have a full account of it; of David's sons; his successors in the throne, as long as the kingdom continued, and the remains of his family in, and after the captivity. From this family, as concerning the flesh, Christ came. Thus we have here the kings of Judah in a lineal succession; the history of whom we have had in the books of Kings, and shall meet with again in the second book of Chronicles. Seldom, if ever, has a crown gone in a direct line from father to son for seventeen descents together, as here. This was a recompence of David's piety. But in the large families of wise, eminent, and pious men, many ~~prophets and scribes~~. Such persons, therefore, as have no children may learn submission to the will of God. If they are destitute of some comforts, they are spared a variety of anxieties and trials. And they to whom God has given children, may learn to bring them up for him to the best of their powers, but neither to expect great things from them, nor to seek great things for them, in this world. The attentive observer will perceive that the posterity of the righteous enjoy many advantages, so that this is the best way of laying up an inheritance for our offspring.

All our gratitude to the instruments of our mercies should be directed to the glory of God; all the prosperity of ourselves and our families will terminate in misery, unless it centre in union with the Son of David, the King of Israel, and the Saviour of sinners.

16. Zedekiah was successor to Jehoiakim, in which sense the word son is sometimes used.

17. Salathiel was the son of Jeconiah. The word *Assir* signifies a prisoner, and seems to be applied here to Jeconiah, who was a long time prisoner in Babylon.—*Greenfield.*

CHAPTER IV.

Genealogies.

In this chapter we have a further account of the genealogies of the tribe of Judah, the most numerous and most famous of all the tribes; also an account of the posterity and cities of Simeon. The writer is most particular in the register of the tribe of Judah; that tribe, with its appendages, Simeon, Benjamin, and Levi, made up the kingdom of Judah, which long survived the other tribes in Canaan; and, when this was written, returned out of captivity, when the generality of the other tribes were lost.

The most remarkable person in this chapter is Jabez. It is not said whose son he was, nor does it appear in what age he lived. His mother gave him the name with this reason, Because I bare him with sorrow. Usually, the sorrow in bearing is afterward forgotten, for joy that the child is born; but here, it seems, that care was taken to perpetuate the remembrance of it while he lived. The sorrow he carried in his name might help to put a seriousness upon his spirit. It might also remind him to love and honour his mother, and to labour in every thing to be a comfort to her. It is piety in children thus to requite their parents, 1 Tim. 5. 4.

We are not told upon what account Jabez was more honourable than his brethren. It should seem, by the mention of him, that his name was well known. We find here that he was a praying man: by prayer he obtained blessings from God, which added much to his honour. The way to be truly great, is to seek to do God's will, and to pray earnestly. Here is the prayer he made. Observe, Jabez prayed to the living and true God, who alone can hear and answer prayer; and, in prayer he regarded him as the God of Israel, a God in covenant with his people, the God with whom Jacob wrestled and prevailed, and was thence called Israel. His prayer, as the margin reads it, was a solemn vow. He does not express his promise, but leaves it to be understood; either because he was afraid to promise in his own strength, or because he resolved to devote himself entirely to God. Lord, if thou wilt bless me and keep me, do what thou wilt with me; I will be at thy command and disposal for ever. As the text reads it, this was the language of a most ardent

and affectionate desire, O that thou wouldest bless me!

Four things Jabez prayed for. 1. That God would bless him indeed. Spiritual blessings are the best blessings; and those are blessed indeed who are blessed with them. God's blessings are real things, and produce real effects. We can but wish a blessing, He commands it: those whom he blesses, are blessed indeed. 2. That He would enlarge his coast; that He would prosper his endeavours for the increase of what fell to his lot. That God would enlarge our hearts, and so enlarge our portion in himself, and in the heavenly Canaan, ought to be our desire and prayer. 3. That God's hand might be with him. The prayer of Moses for this tribe of Judah was, That his own hands might be sufficient for him, Deut. 33. 7; but Jabez expects not that, unless he have God's hand with him, and the presence of his power. God's hand with us, to lead us, protect us, strengthen us, and to work all our works in us and for us, is indeed a hand sufficient for us, all-sufficient. 4. That he would keep him from evil, the evil of sin, the evil of trouble, all the evil designs of his enemies, that they might not hurt, nor make him a Jabez indeed, a man of sorrow. God granted that which he requested. God was of old ready to hear prayer: his ear is not now heavy. These ancient believers saw a type of heaven in the land of Canaan, and their wars represented the conflict of God's people with their enemies: thus every clause of the prayer of Jabez was applied to, and perhaps was intended for more noble and spiritual blessings. This instructive example, in the midst of abstruse genealogies, appears a recompence intended for the careful student of God's word, who reverently examines the whole, comparing one part with another, without disregarding or undervaluing any.

Events which at first occasion the most sorrow, often end in the greatest comfort. It is natural for us to record our sorrows rather than our mercies, though we may wonder that the mercies are so many, and the sorrows so few. All earthly good things put together cannot "bless indeed." True happiness consists in the image and favour of God: for this we should pray, as resolved not to depart without it. The pardon of sin, the gift of righteousness, and the first fruits of the Spirit, form the beginning of this happiness; but the world,

Satan, and indwelling sin, straiten us on every side, and keep us from our inheritance. We should pray to Israel's God to enlarge our coast, that we may attain to greater holiness, liberty, comfort, and usefulness, and gain victory over our enemies, and deliverance from them. We may pray to be kept from the evil of suffering, which is grievous to nature; but the evil of sinning most disquiets the spiritual mind. Against this Jabez most earnestly prays. Blessed be the Lord; he is ever ready to grant, and to exceed our prayers for promised blessings. We are our own enemies if we do not ask and expect great things through the Saviour's name.

22, 23. And Jokim, and the men of Chozebah, and Joash, and Saraph, who sojourned in Moab, but returned to Bethlehem and Hadebasim-ac-thikim. These, and the inhabitants of Netaim and Gadern, were potters employed by the king in his own work.—*Boothroyd*.

CHAPTER V.

Genealogies.

This chapter gives us some account of the two tribes and a half seated on the other side Jordan. They conquered the hagarites, but they were, at length, themselves conquered, and made captives by the king of Assyria, because they had forsaken God. Only two things are here recorded concerning these tribes. 1. They all shared in a victory over the hagarites, so the ishmaelites were then called, to remind them that they were the sons of the bond-woman that was cast out. Being a nation of plunderers, they gave their neighbours just cause for making war upon them. The israelites cried to God, and put their trust in him. They acted as israelites indeed. Though they had a powerful army, they relied not on that, but on the Divine power. They depended on the commission they had from God to wage war with their neighbours for enlarging their coasts. They depended on God's providence to give them success. They cried unto God, especially in the battle. God expects we should cry to him. In our spiritual conflicts we must look up to Heaven for strength; and it is the believing prayer that will be the prevailing prayer. God was entreated of them, though need drove them to him; so ready is he to hear and answer prayer. They were helped against their enemies, for God never yet failed any that trusted in him. And this, because the war was of God, undertaken in his fear, and carried on in

a dependence upon him. If the battle be the Lord's, there is reason to hope it will be successful. We may expect to prosper in an enterprise only when we take God along with us. Happy is that people who live in harmony together, who assist each other against the common enemies of their souls, trusting in the Lord, and calling upon him; who acknowledge him in all their ways, especially in times of trial and temptation. Their victory is certain, their triumphs will be glorious. 2. They shared, at length, in captivity. Had they kept close to God and their duty, they had continued to enjoy both their ancient lot and their new conquests; but they transgressed against the God of their fathers. God stirred up the kings of Assyria, first one and then another, against them; he served his own purposes by the designs of those ambitious monarchs, employed them to chastise these revolt-ers first; and when that reduced them not, then he wholly rooted them out. Those who are governed more by sense than by reason or faith in their choice, may expect to fare accordingly. These tribes were first placed, and first displaced. They would have the best land, not considering that it lay most exposed. Those who rebel against God, and apostatize from him, must in the end be ruined. It will little avail to have names inserted in genealogies, or famous in history, if rejected of God, and shut out from his kingdom. Undue desire of earthly objects draws to a distance from God's ordinances, and assuredly prepares men for their own correction or destruction.

CHAPTER VI.

Genealogies.

Though Joseph and Judah shared between them the forfeited honours of the birthright, yet Levi was first of all the tribes, dignified and distinguished with an honour more valuable than either the precedency or the double portion, and that was the priesthood. Of that tribe we have an account in this chapter. The priests and levites were more concerned than any other israelites, to preserve their pedigree clear, and to be able to prove it; because all the honours and privileges of their office depended upon their descent. And we read of those, who, though perhaps really children of the priests, yet, because they could not make

out their descent by any authentic record, were, as polluted, put from the priesthood, and forbidden to eat of the holy things, Ezra 2. 62, 63.

The line of Eleazar, the successor of Aaron, is here drawn down to the time of the captivity. It begins with Eleazar, who came out of the house of bondage in Egypt; and ends with Jehozadak, who went into the house of bondage in Babylon. Thus, for their sins they were left as they were found; which might also intimate that the levitical priesthood made nothing perfect; that was to be done by bringing in a better hope. All here named were not high priests. In the time of the judges, that dignity was brought into the family of Ithamar, of which Eli was; but in Zadok it returned again to the right line. In David's time, the levites were increased; and though the greater part were dispersed over the nation, to teach the good knowledge of the Lord, yet of those that attended the house of God, there was not constant work for them all; and therefore David, by special commission and direction from God, new-modelled the levites, as we find in the latter part of this book. Here we are told what the work was which he assigned them.

None of the Lord's people, especially ministers, should be unemployed. Those who are not qualified for one service may be useful for another. If change of circumstances shut them out from one method of glorifying God, they should devise another. If they deem nothing which advances true godliness to be too laborious, mean, or discouraging, they cannot be long without employment, or useless. But, though christians and ministers may be very useful to the church, none but our great High Priest can make atonement for sin, nor can any be accepted save through the atonement.

How barren to us is this register, both of incident and interest; and yet, as barren rocks and sandy deserts make integral and necessary parts of the globe, so do these genealogical tables make necessary parts of the history of providence and grace in the maintenance of truth, and the establishment of the church of Christ. Therefore, none that fear God will despise or lightly esteem them.—(11.)

28. See 1 Sam. 8. 2. The word Joel here appears to be lost out of the text, and the word Vashni, which signifies the second, and applies to Abiah, is made into a proper name.—*Greenfield.*

54—81. This account is much the same with that which we had, Josh. 21. We need not be critical in comparing them. It is common for cities to have several names. Sarum and Salisbury, Salop and Shrewsbury, are more unlike than Hilen, ver. 58, and Holon, Josh. 21. 15; Ashan, ver. 59, and Ain, Josh. 21. 16; Alemeth, ver. 60, and Almon, Josh. 21. 18; and time changes names.—*Henry.*

CHAPTER VII.

Genealogies.

In this chapter we have some account of the genealogies of Issachar, ver. 1—5; Benjamin, ver. 6—12; Naphtali, ver. 13; Manasseh, ver. 14—19; Ephraim, ver. 20—29; Asher, ver. 30—40. Here is no account, either of Zebulun or Dan. Why they only should be omitted, we can assign no reason; only it is the disgrace of the tribe of Dan, that idolatry began in that colony of the danites which fixed in Laish, and called it Dan, and there one of the golden calves was set up by Jeroboam. Dan is omitted, Rev. 7.

Here is an account of an incursion of the philistines into Goshen, to make depredations on the cattle of the children of Israel, ver. 21. Ephraim, of whom it had been declared that it should be a numerous and prosperous tribe, was thus at first diminished. The dispensations of Providence sometimes appear to run counter to the promises of God. Their performance thus may be the more seen and admired. Though the premature death of children must afflict us, yet we should not mourn as without hope, for the Lord is able to make up all our losses. The consolations of the gospel are sufficient to counterbalance every evil that can befall believers or their families; to render both life and death tolerable, if not joyful. And if men venture their lives to preserve their cattle, surely we should be willing to give up, venture, and suffer any thing for the sake of Christ and his precious salvation.

12. Some take the hebrew word Aher for a common, not a proper name, and render the words the sons of "another," namely, Dan. See Gen. 46. 23, where Hushim is mentioned, and as the sons of Dan. Bilhab, mentioned in the next verse, was the mother of Dan. The word "another" is used by hebrew writers to denote any thing abominable which they do not like to mention, and the tribe of Dan was become abominable on account of its idolatry.—*Poole.*

CHAPTER VIII.

Genealogies.

There is some account of Benjamin in the foregoing chapter; here is a larger

catalogue of the great men of that tribe. Of that tribe came Saul, the first king of Israel, to the history of whom Ezra is hastening. That tribe clave to Judah, inhabited much of Jerusalem, was one of the two tribes that went into captivity and returned back, which also is referred to.

As to the difficulties that occur in this and the foregoing genealogies, we need not perplex ourselves. Probably Ezra took them as he found them in the books of the kings of Israel and Judah, ch. 9. 1, according as they were given in by the several tribes, each observing what method they thought fit. Hence, some ascend, others descend; some have numbers affixed, others places; some have historical remarks intermixed, others have not; some are shorter, others longer; some agree with other records, others differ. This holy man wrote as he was moved by the Holy Ghost; but there was no necessity for the making up of the defects, nor for rectifying the mistakes of these genealogies, by inspiration. It was sufficient that he copied so much of them as was requisite to the present purpose, which was the directing of the returned captives to settle, as near as they could, with those of their own family, and in the places of their former residence. We may suppose that many things in these genealogies, which to us seem intricate, abrupt, and perplexed, were plain and easy at that time, and fully answered the intention of the publishing of them.

Many great and mighty nations then were in being upon earth, and many illustrious men in them, whose names are buried in perpetual oblivion; while the names of multitudes of the Israel of God are here carefully preserved in everlasting remembrance. They are Jasher, Jeshurun, just ones, and the memory of the just is blessed. But many of these, we have reason to fear, came short of everlasting honour, for even the wicked kings of Judah come into the genealogy; yet the perpetuating of their names here, was a figure of the writing of the names of all God's spiritual Israel in the Lamb's book of life. May this be our privilege, however unnoticed in the partial histories of mankind. Alas, what will it avail to be admired as men of valour and activity to those who perish in an unequal contest with the Almighty! Let us seek peace with Him.

33. Saul's pedigree is carried higher, 1 Sam. 9. 1; only there Kish is said to be the son of

Abiel, here of Ner. He was the son of Ner, but the grandson of Abiel, as appears by 1 Sam. 14. 51, where it is said that Ner was the son of Abiel, and that Abner, who was the son of Ner, was Saul's uncle, that is, his father's brother; therefore his father was also the son of Ner. It is common, in all languages, to put sons for grandsons, and other descendants, and especially in the language of the hebrews.—*Henry.*

CHAPTER IX.

Genealogies.

This chapter intimates that one end of recording all these genealogies was, to direct the jews, when they were returned out of captivity, with whom to incorporate, and where to reside. The first verse looks back upon the foregoing genealogies, and tells us they were gathered out of the books of the kings of Israel and Judah; not that which we have in the canon of scripture, but a civil record, which was authentic. Mentioning Israel and Judah, the writer notices their being carried away to Babylon for their transgression. Let that judgment never be forgotten, but ever be remembered for warning to posterity, to take heed of the sins that brought it upon them. Whenever we speak of any calamity that has befallen us, it is good to add this, "It was for my transgression;" that God may be justified, and clear when he judges. Then follows an account of the first inhabitants, after their return from captivity, that dwelt in their cities, especially in Jerusalem.

It was foretold that the children of Judah and of Israel should be gathered together, and come up out of the land, Hos. 1. 11, and that they should be one nation again, Ezek. 37. 22. Trouble drives those together that have been at variance. Many, both of Judah and Israel, staid behind in captivity; but some of both, whose spirits God stirred up, inquired the way to Zion again.

Here is an account of the good posture into which the affairs of religion were put, immediately on the return from Babylon. To be a door-keeper in the house of God is honourable employment. If the Lord be with us, it will be honourable and comfortable to us, and profitable to others; but without this, our services will be formal, and our souls miserable. Every one knew his charge. Work is likely to be done well when every one knows the duty of his place, and makes a business of it. God is the God of order; but what is every body's work, will

be nobody's work. The singers were employed day and night. They were the chief fathers of the levites, that made this duty their business. They remained in the chambers of the temple, that they might closely and constantly attend it, and were therefore discharged from all other services. Those who are intrusted to watch for men's souls as they that must give account, should reside upon the spot if possible, that they may be near to, and ready for their work at every hour. It should seem some companies were continually singing, at least at stated hours, both day and night. Thus was God continually praised, as it is fit he should be, who is continually doing good. Thus devout people might at any hour have assistance in their devotion. Thus was that temple a figure of the heavenly one, where they rest not day nor night from praising God, Rev. 4. 8. Blessed be his name, believers there shall, not in turn, but all together, without interruption, praise him night and day; may the Lord grant unto each of us meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light.

CHAPTER X.

The death of Saul.

The design chiefly in view in these books of the Chronicles, appears to be to preserve the records of the house of David; which, though much sunk and lessened, to a common eye, by the captivity, yet grew more and more illustrious in the eyes of those that lived by faith, by the nearer approach to the Son of David. Therefore the writer repeats, not the history of Saul's reign, but only of his death, by which way was made for David to the throne. This account of Saul's death is the same with that, 1 Sam. 31. We need not repeat the exposition of it. Only let us observe—We do not find that the israelites were, at this time, guilty of idolatry, as they had been before in the days of the judges, and were afterwards in the days of the kings. Samuel had reformed them, and they were reformed; yet they are thus given to the spoil, and to the robbers. No doubt there was enough in them to deserve it; but Divine justice chiefly regarded the sin of Saul. Princes and great men should, in a special manner, take heed of provoking God's wrath; for if they kindle that fire, they know not how

many may be consumed by it for their sakes. And from the triumphs of Divine justice in the ruin of Saul, we may learn, 1. That the sin of sinners will certainly find them out, sooner or later; Saul died for his transgression. 2. That no man's greatness can exempt him from the judgments of God. 3. Disobedience is a killing thing. Saul died for not keeping the word of the Lord.

Many reject God's counsel, and will hearken to none of his reproof, till he leaves them to eat of the fruit of their own ways, and to be filled with their own devices. Many who pretend to seek the Lord, are so careless in doing it, are so soon weary, and so readily listen to Satan's temptations, that God accounts it no inquiry at all, (ver. 14: see 1 Sam. 28. 6.) May we seek the Lord while he may be found, and until we obtain pardon, peace, and sanctifying grace from him. May we be delivered from unbelief, impatience, and despair. Waiting on the Lord, we shall obtain a kingdom that cannot be moved.

6. All of Saul's family that were present with him in the battle were slain.

(See 1 Sam. 31.)

CHAPTER XI.

Ver. 1—9. *David raised to the throne by general consent.*

David was brought to the possession of the throne of Israel, after he had reigned seven years in Hebron, over Judah only. Observe, 1. God's counsels will be fulfilled at last, whatever difficulties lie in the way. If God have said, David shall rule, it is in vain to oppose it. 2. Men who have long stood in their own light, when they have wearied themselves with their lying vanities, it is to be hoped will understand the things which belong to their peace, and return to their own mercies. 3. Between prince and people there is an original contract, which both ought religiously to observe. If ever any prince might claim absolute despotic power, David might, and he might as safely as any have been intrusted with it; yet he made a covenant with the people to rule by law.

In seeking the glory of God and the good of man, by endeavouring to advance the kingdom of Christ, the Lord's Anointed, kings most effectually secure their own honour and exaltation. He will surely wax greater and greater, the Lord

of hosts being with him, till all his enemies are placed under his feet, and all his friends are placed with him upon his throne. The way to be truly great is to be really useful, to devote all our talents and services to the Lord.

Ver. 10—47. *A list of David's mighty men.*

An account is given of David's worthies, the great men of his time who served him, and were preferred by him. This catalogue is much the same as that in 2 Sam. 23; only those named here, from ver. 41 to the end, are added. The Lord of hosts was with David, and these were the mighty men he had. God was with him, and wrought for him, but by men and means, and the use of second causes. By this it appeared that God was with him, that he inclined the hearts of those to come over to him, who were able to serve his interests. If God be for us, none can be against us; and if God be for us, all that we have occasion for shall be for us. Yet David ascribed his success and increase, not to the hosts he had, but to the Lord of hosts; not to the mighty men that were with him, but to the mighty God, whose presence with us is all in all.

These are the men who strengthened themselves with him, ver. 10. In strengthening him, they strengthened themselves, and their own interest, for his advancement was theirs. We shall gain by what we do in our places for the support of the kingdom of the Son of David. In strengthening it, we strengthen ourselves. The good service that they did to their king and country, made all these men honourable. The way to be great, is to do good. Nor did they gain this honour without labour, and the hazard of their lives. The honours of Christ's kingdom are prepared for those who fight the good fight of faith, who labour and suffer, and are willing to venture all, even life itself, for Christ and a good conscience. It is by a patient continuance in well-doing that we must seek for glory, and honour, and immortality; and they that are faithful to the Son of David, shall find their names registered much more to their honour than these are in the records of fame.

Dr. Kennicott has very minutely examined 2 Sam. 5. and 23. also 1 Chron. 11. He collates the chapters very carefully, pointing out the variations, correcting them as far as possible, and assigns these to their causes, considering that the discovery and correction of mistakes found in

the present copies, and which appear to have arisen mostly from the negligence of transcribers, or the inattention of the translators, must restore those books nearer to the pure state in which they came from the hands of their inspired authors. By this collation he has reconciled the discrepancies which at first appear in some of the verses, and from thence he gives a clear testimony that the hebrew copies of the scriptures are much more free from mistakes of transcription than any other books in the world, in proportion to their size and antiquity.

(See 2 Sam. 5. 1—10; 23. 8—39.)

CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1—22. *Those who came to David at Ziklag.*

We have here an account of those who appeared and acted as David's friends, while he was persecuted. Some, even of Saul's brethren, of the tribe of Benjamin, and akin to him, came over to David. Some of the tribe of Gad, though on the other side Jordan, had such a conviction of David's title to, and fitness for the government, that they separated from their brethren to go to David, though he was in the hold in the wilderness; probably some of his strong holds in the wilderness of Engedi; they were but few, eleven in all, here named, but they added much to David's strength. They were men that could break through the greatest difficulties. Upon some expedition, perhaps this to David, they swam over Jordan, while it overflowed all its banks. Those are fit to be employed in the cause of God, who venture thus in dependence upon the Divine protection. No difficulties or dangers should deter the sinner from coming to the Saviour, or drive the believer from the path of duty. Those who break through obstructions, and overcome enemies in these attempts, will find a gracious and abundant recompence.

Some of Judah and Benjamin came to him. David was surprised to see them, and could not but conceive a jealousy of their intentions, having been so often in danger by treachery. He might well be timorous, whose life was so much struck at; might well be suspicious, who had been deceived in so many, that he said, in his haste, All men are liars. He puts the matter to themselves, he deals fairly with them. As they are, they shall find him; so shall all that deal with the Son of David. David does not imprecate any fearful judgment upon them, though they should deal treacherously, but refers himself to the Divine wisdom and justice. It becomes those who appeal to God, to ex-

press themselves with great temper and moderation; for the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God.

From the words of Amasai we may take instruction how to testify our affection and allegiance to the Lord Jesus; his we must be without reservation or power of revocation; on his side we must be forward to appear and act; to his interest we must be hearty well-wishers. Integrity and affection will dictate such language as to give full satisfaction without further difficulty. Peace or victory, prosperity and happiness, are insured to those whom God helpeth. If we are under the influence of the Spirit, we shall desire to have our lot among them, and declare on their side; if in faith and love we embrace the cause of Christ, his heart will be knit unto us; he will receive, employ, and advance us. Hosanna, prosperity to his gospel and kingdom; for his God helpeth him, and will, till he hath put down all opposing rule, principality, and power!

Some of Manasseh likewise joined David. Providence gave them opportunity, when he and his men marched through their country, when Achish took David with him, 1 Sam. 29. They came very seasonably to help him against the band of amalekites, who plundered Ziklag, and did David good service upon that occasion, 1 Sam. 30. See how Providence provides. David's interest grew when he had occasion to use it.

Ver. 23—40. *Those who came to David at Hebron.*

We have here an account of those who were active in perfecting the settlement of David upon the throne after the death of Ishbosheth. The cause of our heavenly King appears weak and obscure to a carnal eye; but his kingdom and glory will advance, and his host become innumerable and invincible. Families and nations, hitherto strangers and enemies, will shortly become his willing subjects.

The men of Issachar were the fewest of all, yet were serviceable to David's interest. Those of that tribe were greatly intent on public affairs; they knew what Israel ought to do; from observation and experience they learned both their own and others' duty and interest. In this critical juncture, they knew Israel ought to make David king. They were men of great interests, for all their brethren were at their commandment.

The men of Judah, and others of the adjacent tribes, prepared provisions for their brethren when they came to Hebron. Those who were at the least pains in going to this convention, thought themselves obliged to be at the more charge in entertaining the rest. A noble feast was made upon this occasion, for there was joy in Israel. The sinner's submission to his Lord and Saviour brings in a day of joy and gladness, which his brethren share, and to which they contribute. When the throne of Christ is set up in a soul, there is, or ought to be great joy in that soul; and provision is made, not as here, for two or three days, but for the whole life, nay, for eternity. Happy are those who wisely perceive it to be their duty and interest, to submit to the Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of David; who renounce for his sake all that is inconsistent; whose earnest endeavours to do good are directed by the wisdom that God giveth, through acquaintance with his word, and maturity of experience and observation. If any man lack this wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ver. 1—5. *David consults about bringing the ark from its obscurity.*

Here is David's pious proposal to bring the ark of God to Jerusalem, that the royal city might be the holy city. This part of the history we had not in Samuel. We may observe, that as soon as David was seated on his throne, he had thoughts concerning the ark of God; Let us bring that to us. He aimed to honour God, by showing respect to his ark, the token of his presence. As soon as he had power in his hand, he would use it for the advancement and encouragement of religion. It ought to be the first and great care of those who are enriched and preferred, to honour God with their honours, and to serve him, and the interests of his kingdom among men, with their wealth and power. David said not, What magnificent thing shall I do now? or, What pleasant thing? but, What pious thing, to have the comfort and benefit of that sacred oracle? Let us bring it to us, that it may be a blessing to us. Those who honour God profit themselves. It is the wisdom of those who are setting out

in the world, to take God's ark with them, and to make his oracles their counsellors, and his laws their rule. Those are likely to proceed in the favour of God, who begin in the fear of God.

David consulted with the leaders of the people, that they joining in the removal of the ark, it might pass the better for a national act, and so might procure a national blessing. He would have the people summoned to attend on this occasion. It is worth while to travel far, to attend the ark of God. They came from all parts of the country, from the river of Egypt, the utmost part south, to the entering of Hemath, which lay furthest north, to this solemnity.

Ver. 6—14. *The removal of the ark to the house of Obed-edom.*

The account of the solemnity of bringing up the ark, and the circumstances that attended it, is also given, 2 Sam. 6. We shall only observe, 1. Let the sin of Uzza warn us all to take heed of presumption, rashness, and irreverence, in dealing with holy things, and not to think that a good intention will justify a bad action. 2. Let the punishment of Uzza convince us that the God with whom we have to do, is a jealous God. Let us not dare to trifle with God in our approaches to him; and yet let us, through Christ, come boldly to the throne of grace; for we are under the dispensation of liberty and grace, not of bondage and terror. 3. Let the damp this gave to the joy of Israel, remind us always to rejoice with trembling, and to serve the Lord with fear, even when we serve him with gladness. 4. Let David's displeasure upon this occasion caution us to take heed to our spirits, when we are under Divine rebukes, lest, instead of submitting to God, we quarrel with him. 5. Let the stop thus put to the solemnity, caution us not to be driven off from our duty by those providences which are only intended to drive us from our sins. 6. Let the blessing which the ark brought with it to the house of Obed-edom encourage us to welcome God's ordinances into our houses; nor let it be the less precious to us, for its being to some a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence. If the gospel be to some a savour of death unto death, as the ark was to Uzza, yet let us receive it in the love of it, and it will be to us a savour of life unto life.

(See 2 Sam. 6. 3—11.)

CHAPTER XIV.

David's victories.

In this chapter we have an account of, 1. David's kingdom established. 2. His family built up. 3. His enemies, the philistines, defeated. This is repeated from 2 Sam. 5.

Let the fame of David, not only in his own kingdom, but among his neighbours, be looked upon as a type and figure of the exalted honour of the Son of David. The fame of David went out into all lands: he was spoken of, and admired by all people; the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations. All looked upon him as a formidable enemy, and a desirable ally. Thus has God highly exalted our Redeemer, and given him a name above every name.

(See remarks on 2 Sam. 5.)

CHAPTER XV.

Ver. 1—24. *Preparations for the removal of the ark to the city of David.*

David prepared a place for the reception of the ark, before he brought it to him. He had not time to build a house, but he pitched a tent for it of curtains and boards. When he made houses for himself in the city of David, he prepared a place for the ark. Wherever we build for ourselves, we must be sure to make room for God's ark, for a church in the house. Now he bethought himself of that which he could not but know before, that none ought to carry the ark, but the levites. Wise and good men may be guilty of oversights, which they will correct, as soon as they are aware of them. David does not try to justify what had been done amiss, nor to lay the blame on others, but owns himself guilty, with others, of not seeking God in a due order.

The levites and priests were sanctified, and were ready to carry the ark on their shoulders, according to the law. Many that are very remiss in their duty, if they were but faithfully told of it, would reform and do better. Officers were appointed to be ready to bid the ark welcome, with all possible expressions of joy. David ordered the chief of the levites to nominate those whom they knew to be proficient, for this service. Heman, Asaph, and Ethan were now first appointed. As every man has received the gift, so he ought to minister the same,

1 Pet. 4. 10. And those who excel in any endowment, should not only use it for the common good themselves, but teach others also.

20, 21. Alamothe and Sheminith. Probably the names of musical instruments.

Ver. 25—29. *The removal of the ark.*

God helped the levites that carried the ark. It is good to notice the assistance of Divine Providence, even in things which fall within the compass of our natural powers: if God did not help us, we could not stir a step. In all our religious exercises, we must particularly derive help from Heaven: see Acts 26. 22. All our sufficiency for holy duties is from God. The levites, remembering the breach upon Uzza, were ready to tremble when they took up the ark; but God helped them, he encouraged them, silenced their fears, and strengthened their faith. God helped them to carry it without making any mistake. If we perform religious duties in any degree aright, we must own it was God that helped us; had we been left to ourselves, we should have been guilty of some fatal errors. God's ministers have special need of Divine help in their ministrations, that God in them may be glorified, and his church edified. And if God help them, the people have the benefit. When they experienced the tokens of God's presence with them, they offered sacrifices of praise to him.

Every thing in which we engage must be done in dependence on the mercy of God through the sacrifice of the Redeemer. As it is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed, so, if we go successfully and comfortably through any service, we must remember that God hath helped us, and give him the glory, for without him we can do nothing. When our services are rendered beneficial to the church of God, we may expect, but need not regard the scoffs of unbelievers, and must learn to bear them with patience.

(See remarks on 2 Sam. 6.)

CHAPTER XVI.

Ver. 1—6. *The solemnity with which the ark was fixed.*

Though God's word and ordinances may be clouded and eclipsed for a time, they shall, at length, shine out of obscurity. Their glory was much short of what was intended for the next reign, when the temple was to be built. This was but a tent, a humble dwelling, yet this was the

tabernacle, the temple, which David, in his psalms, often speaks of with so much affection. David, who pitched a tent for the ark, and continued steadfast to it, did far better than Solomon, who built a temple for it, and yet, in his latter end, turned his back upon it. The church's poorest times were its purest.

David showed himself generous to his subjects, as he had found God gracious to him. They whose hearts are enlarged with holy joy, should show it by being open-handed. But, which was far better, he gave them also a blessing in the name of the Lord, as a father, as a prophet; he prayed to God for them, and commended them to his grace. In the name of the Word of the Lord, so the Targum, the essential, eternal Word, who is Jehovah, through whom all blessings come to us.

Ver. 7—36. *David's psalm of praise.*

We have here the thanksgiving-psalm which David, by the Spirit, composed, and delivered to the chief musician, to be sung upon the public entry the ark made into the tent prepared for it: some think he had appointed this hymn to be daily used in the temple-service. David penned many psalms before this, some in the time of his troubles by Saul. It is gathered out of several psalms. From the beginning to ver. 22, is taken from Psa. 105. 1, &c.; and then ver. 23 to ver. 33 is the whole 96th psalm, with little variation; ver. 34 is taken from Psa. 136. 1, and others; the two last verses are taken from the close of Psa. 106. These psalms will be noticed in their proper places; here we take them as put together, noticing their design to thank the Lord. A great duty, to which we need to be excited, and in which we need to be assisted.

1. Let God be glorified in our praises, let his honour be the centre in which all the lines meet. 2. Let others be edified and instructed, that strangers to him may be led into acquaintance with him, allegiance to him, and to adore him. 3. Let us ourselves be encouraged to triumph and trust in God. They that give glory to God's name, are allowed to glory in it. 4. Let the everlasting covenant be the great matter of our joy and praise. Be ye mindful of his covenant. In the parallel place it is, He hath remembered his covenant for ever, Psa. 105. 8. Seeing God never will forget it, we must not. 5. Let God's former mercies to his

people of old, to our ancestors and predecessors in profession, be commemorated by us now, with thankfulness to his praise.

6. Let the great salvation of the Lord be especially the subject of our praises, ver.

23. Show forth from day to day his salvation—his promised salvation by Christ.

We have reason to celebrate that from day to day; for we daily receive the benefit, and it is a subject that can never be exhausted. It has surpassed all former displays of his wisdom, power, truth, and love.

7. Let God be praised by a due and constant attendance upon him in the ordinances he has appointed. Holiness is the beauty of the Lord, the beauty of all sanctified souls, and all religious performances.

8. Let God's universal monarchy be the fear and joy of all people. Let us reverence it, and let us rejoice in it.

9. Let the prospect of the judgment to come, inspire us with an awful pleasure.

O that there were such a heart in us, and in all men, thus to fear Him and to hope in his mercy; that we might look forward with comfort and exultation to meeting him upon his awful judgment seat.

10. In the midst of our praises, we must not forget to pray for the succour and relief of the saints and servants of God that are in distress, those that are scattered and oppressed.

11. Let us make God the Alpha and Omega of all our praises. He began, Give thanks to the Lord; he concludes, ver. 36, Blessed be the Lord.

While the assured believer glories in the righteousness, mercy, and power of his reconciled God, let the trembling sinner rejoice also, for he casteth out none that come, and saveth all that trust in him. When the levites had finished this psalm of prayer and praise, the people that attended, signified their consent and concurrence, by saying, Amen. So they praised the Lord, much affected, no doubt, with this way of devotion, which had been used only in the schools of the prophets, 1 Sam. 10. 5.

Ver. 37—43. *Setting in order the worship of God.*

The worship of God is not only to be the work of a solemn day now and then, it ought to be the work of every day. David settled it for a constancy; put it in method, which he obliged those that officiated to observe in their respective posts.

In the tabernacle of Moses, and afterward in the temple of Solomon, the ark

and the altar were together; but ever since Eli's time they had been separated, and continued so till the temple was built.

Whatever the reason, all David's time they were separated; but he took care that neither should be neglected. At Jerusalem, where the ark was, Asaph and his brethren were appointed to attend, to minister before the ark continually, with songs of praise, as every day's work required. No sacrifices were offered there, nor incense burnt, because the altars were not there; but David's prayers were directed as incense, and the lifting up of his hands as the evening sacrifice, Psa. 141. 2. So early did spiritual worship take place of ceremonial.

Yet the ceremonial worship, being of Divine institution, must by no means be omitted; and therefore at Gibeon, where the altars were, the priests attended; for their work was to sacrifice, and burn incense; and that they did continually, morning and evening, according to the law of Moses. These must be kept up, because however in their own nature they were inferior to the moral services of prayer and praise, yet, as they were types of the mediation of Christ, the observance of them was of great consequence. Here Zadok attended, to preside in the service of the altar; as it is probable, Abiathar settled at Jerusalem, to attend the ark, because he had the breastplate of judgment, which must be consulted before the ark: we read that in David's time, both Zadok and Abiathar were the priests, 2 Sam. 8. 17; 20. 25. At Gibeon, where the altars were, David also appointed singers to give thanks to the Lord; and the burden of their songs must be, For his mercy endureth for ever. They did it with musical instruments of God; such instruments as were appointed and appropriated to this service, not such as they used on other occasions. Between common mirth, and holy joy, there is a vast difference; the limits and distances between them must be carefully observed and kept up. The people were satisfied, and they went home pleased. David returned to bless his house, resolving to keep up his family worship still, which public worship must not supersede.

Here, even in this life, believers have from time to time foretastes of heavenly bliss; but when they cannot reach such fervent affections and exalted strains as they find recorded of others, still they

must stately wait on the Lord in his ordinances, as sinners beholding the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. The continual attendance of his appointed ministers is both right in itself, and is an encouragement to the faith and hope, and a help to the praises and thanksgivings of the people.

CHAPTER XVII.

David's purposes—God's gracious promises to him—David's grateful acknowledgment.

This chapter is the same as 2 Sam. 7. See what is there said upon it.

The reader will have advantage in comparing one with the other, and observing the very forcible language in which both are worded, as well as the light which is thrown upon this remarkable prediction of the prophet Nathan by the different modes of expressing the same idea. The first part announces the glory of Solomon. The second looks into futurity, to the final destination of the people of Israel, promising a rest of such a nature as they have never yet enjoyed. The third predicts the future Son of David, who is described in terms applicable only to a greater than Solomon. And the passage, ver. 13, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son, is expressly applied by St. Paul, Heb. 1. 5, to the Saviour who should come into the world.—(62.)

Upon hearing this prophecy, David, though commanded not to build the temple, proceeded to the sanctuary, and there acknowledged that he did not consider this prediction as referring to his immediate son, or to the building a temple made with hands. The two passages are thus interpreted by bishop Horsley; "And this (namely, what was said about David's house in distant times) is the arrangement about the MAN, O Lord Jehovah," 2 Sam. 7. 19. "And thou hast regarded me in the arrangement about the MAN that is to be from above, O Lord Jehovah," 1 Chron. 17. 17. That is, regard was had to David and his house, by the Messiah being to be born in his family.—(62.)

David's entering into the sanctuary, and acknowledging that he understood the meaning of the figurative language used by the prophet, is a proof that other israelites who expected the future Messiah, comprehended the various predictions which announced in still clearer terms the nature, the person, the life, and the incarnation of the promised Saviour.

It shows us also that the prophecies were of various degrees of clearness, and that when the appointed number of predictions contained in the Old Testament were completed, so satisfactory, and so perfect was the description of our blessed Lord, and so conclusive was the evidence that he was the Messiah, that wilful blindness alone prevented the jews from acknowledging him.—(62.)

And let it not be thought strange that David should speak so plainly of the two natures of Christ, who in spirit called him Lord, though he knew he was to be his Son, Psa. 110. 1, and foresaw him lower than the angels for a little while, but afterward crowned with glory and honour, Heb. 2. 6, 7.

It is very observable that what in Samuel is said to be, "for thy word's sake," is here said to be, "for thy servant's sake," ver. 19. Jesus Christ is both the Word of God, Rev. 19. 13, and the Servant of God, Isa. 42. 1, and it is for his sake, upon account of his mediation, that the promises are both made, and made good, to all believers; it is in Him, that they are yea and amen. For his sake it is done, for his sake it is made known; to Him we owe all this greatness, from Him we are to expect all these great things; they are the unsearchable riches of Christ, which, if by faith we see in themselves, and see in the Lord Jesus, we cannot but magnify as the only true greatness, and speak honourably of them accordingly. For this blessedness may we look amidst the trials of life, and when we feel the hand of death upon us; and may the same be continued to our children after us.

17. "Thou hast regarded me according to the order of the Adam from above, (or the pre-eminent,) O Jehovah," *J. P. Smith*, who shows its reference to the Messiah, and adds, We collect from it that the Messiah would, at an epoch remotely future, descend from David, that he would be the pre-eminent Man, sustaining a relation to the human race, analogous to that of the first Adam, being in some peculiar sense from above, and communicating blessings to the world, by the means of his most righteous, beneficent, and universal reign, a reign decreed by Jehovah to endure in growing prosperity and triumph, till the consummation of all mortal things.

(See remarks on 2 Sam. 7.)

CHAPTER XVIII.

David's victories.

This chapter is the same as 2 Sam. 8.

Our good fight of faith under the Captain of our salvation, will end in everlasting triumph and peace. But the happi-

ness of Israel, through David's victories, and just government, faintly shadowed forth the happiness of the redeemed in the realms above; when the last enemy shall be destroyed, and Jesus shall reign in the midst of them for ever and ever, and they shall behold and share the joy and glory of his kingdom. Let us join ourselves to him, trust in him, serve him; at length we shall be for ever with them.

4. The word translated chariots denotes also "cavalry or riders."—*T. H. Horne*. The latter part of this verse should be read, "David disjointed all the chariots."—*Greenfield*.

CHAPTER XIX.

David's wars.

The history is here repeated of David's war with the ammonites, and the syrians their allies, and the victories he obtained over them, which we read 2 Sam. 10.

The only safety of sinners consists in submitting to the Lord, making our peace with him, and becoming his servants. Let us mutually assist each other in a good cause; but let us fear lest, being made instruments of good to others, we should ourselves come short of salvation, through unbelief and continuance in sin.

18. In 2 Sam. 10. 18, the number is seven hundred. This variation probably arises from mistaking one numeral letter for another, the difference being only a dot at the top of one of them.

CHAPTER XX.

Ver. 1—3. *David's wars with the ammonites.*

The whole account of David's adultery, and the sins and sufferings consequent thereon, is here omitted. When truth and candour permit, and no good end can be answered by speaking on such subjects, it is well to be silent, though by no means to deny, or excuse the sins of any man. Now, as the relating of the sin David fell into, is an instance of the impartiality and fidelity of the sacred writers; so the avoiding of the repetition of it here, teaches us, that though there may be a just occasion to speak of the faults and miscarriages of others, yet we should not take delight in the repetition of them.

3. See note, 2 Sam. 12. 31.

(See 2 Sam. 11. and 12.)

Ver. 4—8. *David's wars with the philistines.*

Though the Lord will severely correct the sins of his believing people, he will not leave them in the hands of their enemies. His assistance will counterbalance all advantages of number and strength of those that defy his Israel. All that trust

in him shall be made more than conquerors through him that loveth them.

(See 2 Sam. 21. 18—22.)

CHAPTER XXI.

David's numbering the people.

No mention is made in this book of David's sin in the matter of Uriah, neither of the troubles that followed it. But David's sin, in numbering the people, is here related, because, in the atonement made for that sin, intimation was given of the place on which the temple should be built. Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to do it. We are sure that God is not the Author of sin, he tempts no man; and therefore when it is said that he moved David to do it, 2 Sam. 24. 1, it must be explained by what is intimated here, that, for wise and holy ends, he permitted the devil to do it. Here we trace this foul stream to its fountain. That Satan, the enemy of God and all good, should stand up against Israel, is not strange. He aims to weaken the strength, diminish the numbers, and eclipse the glory of God's Israel, to whom he is a satan, an adversary. Even the best saints, till they come to heaven, are forbidden to think themselves out of the reach of Satan's temptations.

Most strongly does David's fall on this occasion show the deceitfulness of the human heart, and the craft and subtilty of the devil and man working against us, and urge the necessity of vigilance and prayer, while his rising again furnishes encouragement to all returning penitents not to despair of the riches of Divine mercy.—(35.)

The commanding David to build an altar, was a blessed token of reconciliation; for if God had been pleased to kill him, he would not have appointed, because he would not have accepted a sacrifice at his hands. God testified his acceptance of David's offerings on this altar: he answered him from heaven by fire. To signify that God's anger was turned away from him, the fire that might justly have fastened upon the sinner, fastened upon the sacrifice, and consumed that; and, upon this, the destroying sword was returned into its sheath. Thus Christ was made sin, and a curse for us; it pleased the Lord to bruise him, that through him God might be to us, not a consuming Fire, but a reconciled Father.

The brazen altar which Moses made,

was at Gibeon, and there all the sacrifices of Israel were offered: but the case was so urgent, that David had not time to go to Gibeon: nor durst he leave the angel with his sword drawn over Jerusalem, lest the fatal stroke should be given before he came back. And God, in tenderness to him, bade him build an altar in that place, dispensing with his own law concerning one altar, because of the present distress, and accepting the sacrifices offered on this new altar, which was not set up in opposition to that, but in concurrence with it. Nay, when the present distress was over, it should seem, David, as long as he lived, sacrificed there, though the altar at Gibeon was still kept up; for God had owned the sacrifices that were here offered, and had testified his acceptance of them. On those administrations in which we have experienced the tokens of God's presence, and have found that he is with us of a truth, it is good to continue our attendance.—Here God has graciously met me, and therefore I will still expect to meet with him.

1. The word "satan" properly signifies an adversary, whether to a bad cause or a good one: see Numb. 22. 22, 23; 2 Sam. 19. 22. And thus it is said in the place before us; An adversary to the peace of David and of Israel, stood up, and excited David to number the people.—*Chandler*.
 of 200,000 men between the enumeration of Israel here and in 2 Sam. 24. Several causes have been assigned to explain this. The following from *Baruh* (see *Fragments in Calmet*) appears the most satisfactory. We learn from 1 Chron. 27, that there was an army of 288,000 men who attended the king's orders in a monthly rotation of 24,000 each. These troops added to 12,000, the guard of the princes of the tribes, make the numbers to agree. In the book of Samuel they are not noticed, being in the actual service of the king. In Chronicles they are added; it is there expressly stated that the number is of "all Israel," while in Samuel it is merely said, "and Israel were." The difference in the numbers of Judah is explained by the army of 30,000 in the philistines' country, 2 Sam. 6. 1, being included in Samuel but not in Chronicles, where it may be observed the expression is only, "and those of Judah," not "all Judah." Even if we were not aware of any circumstances which would reconcile these and similar differences, they could not justly be deemed contradictory, as we are ignorant of the particulars on which they were founded. The syriac version reads 800,000 in both places.

12. The greek version has three years, which appears the correct reading. In 2 Sam. 24. 13, it is said "seven years," but the numeral letters are so very similar, that an error may easily have arisen in transcribing.

20. In Samuel it is stated that Ornan or Araunah saw the king, not the angel; the words in the original only differ in one letter.

25. This passage harmonizes with 2 Sam. 24. 24, if we there insert a comma after the word

threshing-floor. It will then appear that David bought the oxen for 50 shekels of silver, which is there stated, omitting the price of the threshing-floor, for which he paid 600 shekels of gold, the price of the oxen being here omitted.—*Carpenter*.
 (For remarks on this history, see 2 Sam. 24.)

CHAPTER XXII.

Ver. 1—5. *David's preparations for the temple*

It was upon occasion of the terrible judgment inflicted on Israel for the sin of David, that God gave intimation of the setting up of another altar, and of the place where he would have the temple to be built; upon which, David was excited with vigour to make preparation for the great work. The tokens he received of God's favour, after those of his displeasure, directed him to the place, and encouraged him to the work.

David must not build, but he would do all he could; he prepared abundantly before his death. The consideration of his age and growing infirmities quickened him, toward his latter end, to be very diligent in making this preparation. What our hands find to do for God, and our souls, and our generation, let us do it with all our might, before our death, for, after death, there is no device nor working. Two things induced him to make such preparation. 1. That Solomon was young and tender. Those who are aged and experienced, should consider those who are young and tender, and provide what help they can, that they may make the work of God as easy to them as possible. 2. That the house must be exceedingly magnificent, every thing about it the best in its kind; for a good reason—it was intended for the honour of the great God, the Lord of the whole earth, and was to be a type of Christ, in whom all fulness dwells, and in whom are hid all treasures. Men were then to be taught by visible methods: the grandeur of the house would help to affect the worshippers with a holy awe and reverence of God, and would invite strangers to come to see it, who thereby would be brought acquainted with the true God. David foretold this good effect, Psa. 68. 29, Because of thy temple at Jerusalem, shall kings bring presents unto thee. Thus when the Lord refuses to employ us in those services which we desired, we must not be discouraged or indolent, but do what we can, though in a humbler sphere.

Ver. 6—16. *David's instructions to Solomon*

The Lord having pointed out the place

where he would have sacrifice offered, David was assured that it was the Lord's will the temple should be built by Solomon in that very spot. The place had been a threshing-floor; thus it aptly represented the visible church, where the wheat and the chaff lie intermingled together, till the Lord shall thoroughly purge his floor, and gather the wheat into his garner, and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Its having been in the possession of a jebusite was an intimation of mercy, intended for the gentiles, through Jesus Christ.

When David came to the throne, he had many things to do; but Solomon had only one thing in charge, that was, to build a house for the Lord God of Israel. It was in David's mind to do it, but God forbade him, because he shed much blood in his wars, for he had been a man of war from his youth; which, though shed in the service of God and Israel, made him less fit than another who had never been called to such work. God, by assigning this as the reason of laying David aside from this work, showed how precious human life is to him, and intended a type of Him who should build the gospel temple, not by destroying men's lives, but saving them, Luke 9. 56.

David gives Solomon the reason why he imposed this task upon him. 1. Because God designed him for it, nominated him as the man that should do it. Nothing is more powerful to engage us in any service for God, than to know that we are appointed thereunto. 2. Because he would have leisure and opportunity to do it. He should be a man of rest, he should have peace and quietness, therefore let him build the house. Where God gives rest, he expects work. 3. Because God had promised to establish his kingdom. Let him build up God's house, and God will build up his throne. God's gracious promises should quicken and strengthen our religious service.

David delivered to Solomon an account of the vast preparations he had made for this building; not from pride and vain-glory, but as an encouragement to Solomon to engage cheerfully in the work, for which so solid a foundation was laid. The treasure here mentioned amounts to such an incredible sum, that most interpreters either allow an error in the copy, or think the word talent here signifies no more than a plate or piece; ingots we call them. Or

a certain number is here put for an uncertain, because it is said that of the gold and silver, as well as of the brass and iron, there was no number; and that David here includes all the dedicated things, ch. 18. 11, which he designed for the house of the Lord, that is, not only for the building of it, but for the treasure of it. He charged Solomon to keep God's commandments, and to take heed to his duty in every thing. He must not think, by building the temple, to purchase a dispensation to sin; on the contrary, his doing that would not be accepted, if he did not take heed to fulfil the statutes which the Lord charged Moses with. He encourages him to go about this great work, and to go on in it. In our spiritual work, as well as in our spiritual warfare, we have need of courage and resolution.

David was a type of Christ in his conflicts, victories, and destruction of his obstinate enemies. Solomon represented the Saviour triumphant, glorified, giving peace and happiness to his willing subjects. In this character the Prince of peace erects his spiritual temple. It more accorded with the nature of the christian dispensation, as well as the character of Jesus, which were represented in this transaction, that the temple should be built by a peaceable prince than by a successful warrior. Otherwise David, in his wars, did God's work, sought his honour, and was eminently serviceable to his people.

9. Or, Behold a son is born unto thee.

14. See the note on ch. 29. 4, 7. The hebrew word, rendered talent, probably signifies only a mass or piece, as it is used 1 Sam. 2. 36; Zech. 5. 7.—*Poole*.

Ver. 17—19. *The princes commanded to assist.*

David engaged the princes of Israel to assist Solomon in the great work he had to do. He presses that upon them, which should make them zealous in it. Let but the heart be sincerely engaged for God, and the head and hand, the estate and interest, and all, will be cheerfully employed for him. Whatever is done towards rendering the word of God more generally known and attended to, is like bringing a stone, or, perhaps, an ingot of gold, towards erecting the temple. This should encourage us when we grieve that we do not see more fruit of our labours; much good may appear after our death which we never thought of. Let us not then be weary of well doing.

The work is in the hands of the Prince

of peace. Let us look to him so to build his spiritual temple, that the fame and glory of it may be spread through all countries, till all the nations of the earth are brought into it. As he, the Author and Finisher of the work, is pleased to employ us as his instruments, let us arise and be doing, encouraging and helping one another; working by his rule, after his example, in dependence on his grace, assured that he will be with us, and that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Ver. 1—23. *David declares Solomon his successor—He takes an account of the levites.*

David, having given charge concerning the building of the temple, settles the method of the temple service, and orders the offices of it. This transaction, the making Solomon king, seems to have preceded David's last sickness, and Adonijah's usurpation, which was thereby rendered more inexcusable.

The ark being now stationed at Jerusalem, the place of the temple appointed, and preparations for building it made, David reduced the service of the priests and levites to a regular method. The number of the israelites had greatly increased, and the attendance upon the tabernacle, with the sacrifices, was much greater than it had been. It was important to make all ready for conducting the temple service with solemnity. David began with numbering the levites. The priests were not included. This tribe had increased in a greater proportion than the others. David distributed the levites to their respective posts, that every hand might be employed, and that every part of the work might be carefully done—of all men, an idle levite makes the worst figure. The work assigned the levites, was fourfold: 1. The greater number were to set forward the work of the house of the Lord. Twenty-four thousand were appointed for this service, to attend the priests in killing the sacrifices; to keep all the vessels and utensils of the temple clean, and every thing in its place, that the service might be performed both with expedition and with exactness. These served a thousand each week, and so went round in twenty-four courses. 2. Others were officers and judges; but in the country. Of these there were six thousand in the several parts of the kingdom, that

assisted in the administration of justice. 3. Others were porters, to guard all the avenues of the house of God. These were the guards of the temple. 4. Others were singers, and players on instruments, whose business it was to keep up that part of the service; this was a new office. Thus the levites were mustered and disposed of into their respective families and kindreds, that an account of them might the better be kept. When those of the same family were employed together, it would engage them to love and assist one another. When Christ sent forth his disciples, two and two, he put together those that were brethren.

Observe that the posterity of Moses had no dignities or privileges at all peculiar to them; while the posterity of Aaron were advanced to the priest's office, to sanctify the most holy things, ver. 13. Moses was no self-seeking man, as appears from his leaving to his children no marks of distinction; which was a sign that he had the Spirit of God, and not the spirit of the world. The elevation of Aaron's family above the rest, was a recompence for his self-denial. When Moses, his younger brother, was made a god to Pharaoh, and he only his spokesman, Aaron readily took the inferior post God put him in. Those who are content to stoop, are in the fairest way to rise. Before honour is humility.

Ver. 24—32. *The office of the levites.*

In the time of Moses, the levites were not taken into service till they were thirty years old, nor admitted as probationers till twenty-five, Numb. 8. 24. David ordered, by Divine direction, that they should be numbered for the service of the house of the Lord, from the age of twenty years and upward. When the work of the levites was to carry burdens, heavy burdens, the tabernacle and its furniture, God would not call any to it till they were come to their full strength; for he considers our frame, and in service as well as in sufferings, will lay no more upon us than we are able to bear. But now God had given rest to his people, and made Jerusalem his dwelling-place for ever, the service was much easier, and they entered upon it at twenty years old. Now the people of Israel were multiplied, it was requisite there should be more employed in the temple service, that every israelite who brought an offering might find a levite ready to assist

him. When more work is to be done, it is pity but there should be more workmen.

We have a further account of the levites' work. A constant succession of religious duties, stated or occasional, public or private, must engage the true minister's attention, day by day continually. A new heart, a spiritual mind, which delights greatly in God's commandments, and can find a refreshing feast in his ordinances, is the first and most essential qualification for the ministry. Indeed it forms the great distinction between the true christian and all other men in the world. To the spiritual man every successive service will yield renewed satisfaction. He will be unwearied and ever abounding in the work of the Lord; being never so happy as when employed for such a good Master, in so pleasant a service. He will not regard whether he be called to take the lead, or to keep the charge of others who are placed over him. May we seek and serve the Lord uprightly, and leave all the rest to his disposal, by faith in his word, and resignation to his will.

29. The levites were employed to superintend the standard of weights and measures.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The divisions of the priests and levites.

This chapter gives us a more particular account of the distribution of the priests and levites into their respective classes. The account of these establishments seems of little use to us; but when Ezra published it, it was of great use to direct affairs after the return from captivity. This distribution was made for the more regular discharge of their office. God was, and is the God of order, and not of confusion, particularly in the things of his worship. When every one has, knows, and keeps his place and work, the more there are the better. In the mystical body, every member has its use, for the good of the whole, Rom. 12. 4, 5; 1 Cor. 12. 12.

The priests were chosen to preside in the affairs of the sanctuary, in their several courses and turns, who should serve first, and who next, that every one might know his course, and attend in it. Among these twenty-four courses, the eighth is that of Abijah or Abia, which is mentioned, Luke 1. 5, as the course of Zacharias, the father of John Baptist; by which it appears that the courses which

David now settled, continued till the destruction of the second temple by the romans. Each course was called by the name of him in whom it was first founded, as the high priest is here called Aaron, ver. 19, because succeeding to his dignity and power, though we read not of any other that bore that name. Whoever was high priest, must be revered and observed by the inferior priests as their father, as Aaron their father. Christ is High Priest over the house of God, to whom all believers, being made priests, are to be in subjection. The principal fathers of the levites cast lots over against their younger brethren; that is, those that were of the elder house, came upon the level with those of the younger families, and took their place, not by seniority, but as God directed. In Christ, no difference is made between bond and free, elder and younger. The younger brethren, if faithful and sincere, shall be no less acceptable to Christ than the principal fathers. May we all be children of the Lord, fitted to sing his praises for ever in his temple above!

The jewish church reaped the advantage of these arrangements for many ages. Let us with gratitude commemorate those eminent reformers in the christian church, who were a blessing in their own times, and from whose zealous exertions we derive most solid benefits. The Lord has a favour to that people among whom he raises up men of such distinguished gifts, of such fortitude and diligence to plead his cause, and to promote the interests of religion.—(60.)

CHAPTER XXV.

The singers and musicians.

David, having settled the courses of the levites that were to attend the priests in their ministrations, proceeds to put those into order who were appointed to be singers and musicians in the temple. To prophesy, in this place, seems to mean praising God with great earnestness and devout affections, under the influences of the Holy Spirit; in exciting these affections, poetry and music were employed. If the Spirit of God do not put life and fervour into our devotions, they will, however ordered, be a lifeless, worthless form.

The psalms they sang were composed by prophets, and many of them were prophetic; and the edification of the church was intended in it, as well as the glory of

God. This is called a service, and the persons employed in it workmen. Not but that it is the greatest liberty and pleasure to be employed in praising God: what is heaven but that? But this intimates that it is our duty to make a business of it, and stir up all that is within us to it; and that, in our present state of corruption and infirmity, it will not be done, as it should be done, without labour and struggle. We must take pains with our hearts to bring them and to keep them in this work; to engage all that is within us.

The glory and honour of God were intended in this temple music, whether vocal or instrumental. It was to give thanks and praise the Lord, that they were employed. This agrees with the intention of the perpetuating psalmody in the gospel church, which is, to make melody with the heart, in conjunction with the voice, unto the Lord, Eph. 5. 19. The fathers presided in this service, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun. This gives a good example to parents to train up their children, and to all seniors to instruct their juniors, in the service of God, particularly in praising of him. It gives also an example to the younger to submit themselves to the elder, and, as far as may be, to do what they do under their hand. All believers are one in Christ Jesus, being children of God, fellow-heirs of eternal life, and brethren to each other. May they all on earth emulate that love, peace, and harmony which will subsist in the heavenly world.

1. Probably Jeduthun and Ethan, ch. 6. 44, were the same person.

3. Each master singer had in his chorus the number of twelve, called their sons and their brethren; because they observed them as sons, and concurred with them as brethren.—*Henry.*

CHAPTER XXVI.

The officers of the levites.

Porters were appointed to attend the temple, who guarded all the avenues, opened and shut all the outer gates, and attended to direct and instruct those who were going to worship in the courts of the sanctuary; to encourage those that were timorous, to send back the strangers and unclean, and to guard against thieves, and others that were enemies to the house of God. The porters and treasurers of the temple had occasion for strength and valour to oppose those who improperly attempted to enter the sanctuary, and to guard the sacred treasures. *Josephus*

speaks of the gates of the temple as being so massive as to require twenty persons to open or shut them. David had received instruction from the Lord what the temple was to be, ch. 28. 11, 12, and he arranged every thing with reference thereto. The office of porter in the temple was a place of great trust, and honourable. The different families or divisions cast lots at which gate they should keep ward, and then the persons of those divisions attended in rotation.

There were treasures of the house of God. Much was expended daily upon the altar; flour, wine, oil, salt, fuel, beside the lamps; quantities of these were to be kept beforehand, beside the sacred vestments and utensils. These were the treasures of the house of God. These treasures typified the plenty there is in our heavenly Father's house, enough and to spare. From those sacred treasuries, the unsearchable riches of Christ, all our wants are supplied; but, receiving from his fullness, we must give him the glory, and endeavour to dispose of our abilities and substance according to his will.

There were treasures of things dedicated mostly out of the spoils won in battle, as a grateful acknowledgment of the Divine protection. This pious custom had been revived; not only Samuel and David, but Saul, and Abner, and Joab, had dedicated of their spoils to the honour and support of the house of God. The more God bestows on us, the more he expects from us in works of piety and charity. Great successes call for proportionable returns. When we look over our estates, let us consider, Here are convenient things, rich things it may be, and fine things; but where are the dedicated things?

The offices of the house of God being well provided with levites, we have an account of those employed as officers and judges in the outward business, which must not be neglected. The magistracy is an ordinance of God for the good of the church, as truly as the ministry. The levites were employed in the administration of justice, with the princes and elders of the several tribes, who could not be supposed to understand the law so well as the levites. None of those levites who were employed in the service of the sanctuary, none of the singers or porters, were concerned in this outward business; either one was enough to engage the whole man, or it was presumption to undertake both.

Wisdom, courage, strength of faith, holy affections, and constancy of mind in the performance of our duty, are requisite or useful for every station. This is said to be done, as were all the foregoing settlements, in the fortieth year of the reign of David. That was the last year of his reign. We should be so much the more industrious to do good as we see the day approaching.

David fixed the due order of the priests and levites in their offices, and gave directions for the regular observance of the sacred ordinances. And do we not perceive in our illustrious Head a similar care to promote the comfort and prosperity of his church? To Him we are taught to look as the great Master of assemblies. In obedience to Him we sanctify his day, frequent his house, celebrate his sacraments, reverence his faithful ministers, and listen to the word of reconciliation.—(60.)

CHAPTER XXVII.

Ver. 1—15. *David's military force.*

When David was not actually engaged in war, 24,000 men were kept under military discipline. These were exchanged every month, so that 288,000 men were exercised regularly, but were not kept from other engagements more than a month at a time. It seems that this plan of the militia was laid in the beginning of David's reign, for Asahel was killed by Abner while David reigned in Hebron. When his wars were over, he revived this, and left the military affairs in this posture, for the peaceable reign of Solomon. In the kingdoms of this world readiness for war forms a security for peace—in like manner nothing so much encourages Satan's assaults as unwatchfulness. So long as we stand armed with the whole armour of God, in the exercise of faith, and preparation of heart for the conflict, we shall certainly be safe, and probably enjoy inward peace.

Ver. 16—34. *Princes and officers.*

We do not read here of officers merely to make a show of magnificence. Ancient simplicity was preferable to modern refinement, and the useful productions of the earth to all the devices of luxury and indulgence. The officers of the court, or the rulers of the king's substance, as they are called, ver. 31, were such as had the oversight and charge of the king's tillage,

his vineyards, his herds, his flocks. The attendants on the king's person were such as were eminent for wisdom. Ahithophel, a very cunning man, was his counsellor; but Hushai, an honest man, was his companion and confidant. It does not appear that David had many counsellors; but those he had were men of great abilities. Much of the wisdom of princes is seen in the choice of their ministry. But David, though he had all these trusty counsellors about him, preferred the word of God before them all. Thus it is written, Thy testimonies are my delight, and my counsellors, Psa. 119. 24.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Ver. 1—10. *David exhorts the people to the fear of the Lord.*

An interesting transaction seems to have occurred during David's last sickness, which, notwithstanding intervals, he was aware would terminate in his death. He summoned the several descriptions of men mentioned in the preceding chapter, that he might declare to them the will of God, and engage them to those measures which he had resolved upon in obedience to the Divine will. Many chief priests and levites were with David at Jerusalem. Finding himself able, and being animated by the solemn occasion, David stood upon his feet, to express his earnestness in his address, and in reverence to God, whose will he was to declare, and in respect to this solemn assembly of the Israel of God. He declared his purpose to build a temple for God, and God's disallowing of that purpose. This he had signified to Solomon, ch. 22. 7, 8.

He opened to them God's gracious purposes concerning Solomon, "I have chosen him to be my son." Thus he declared the decree, that the Lord had said to Solomon, as a type of Christ, Thou art my son, Psa. 2. 7, the son of my love; for he was called Jedidiah, because the Lord loved him, and Christ is his beloved Son. Of him God said, as a figure of Him that was to come, 1. He shall build my house. Christ is both the Founder and the Foundation of the gospel temple. 2. I will establish his kingdom for ever. This must have its accomplishment in the kingdom of the Messiah, which shall continue in his hands through all the ages of time, Isa. 9. 7; Luke 1. 33, and shall then be de-

livered up to God, even the Father, yet, perhaps, to be delivered back to the Redeemer for ever. As to Solomon, this promise of the establishment of his kingdom is here made conditional—If he be constant to do my commandments, as at this day. If we be constant to our duty, then, and not otherwise, we may expect the continuance of God's favour. Let those who are well taught, and begin well, take notice of this—if they are constant, they are happy; perseverance wears the crown, though it wins it not.

David charged them to adhere steadfastly to God and their duty. God's commandments must be their rule; they must make conscience of keeping them, and, in order thereunto, must seek for them, search the scriptures, take advice, seek the law at their mouth whose lips were to keep this knowledge, and pray to God to teach and direct them. The arguments to enforce this charge are—that the secrets of our souls are open before God; and that we are happy or miserable here, and for ever, accordingly as we serve God. One argument is peculiar to Solomon; Thou art to build a house for the sanctuary. The means prescribed are prescribed to us all. 1. Caution. Take heed; beware of every thing that looks like, or leads to that which is evil. 2. Courage. Be strong, and do it. We cannot do our work as we should unless we put on resolution, and fetch in strength from Divine grace.

Religion or piety has two distinct parts. The first is knowledge of God, the second is worship of God. They are here, ver. 9, described by David; he recommends to Solomon his son the care and love of religion and piety, before all other things. The sum of this he reduces to these heads, when he says, *Know* thou the God of thy father, and *serve* him with a perfect heart and a willing mind.—(56.)

God is made known by his works and his word. Revelation alone gives us the whole character of God, in his providence, his holy law, his condemnation of sinners, his blessed gospel, the ministration of righteousness and of the Spirit to all true believers. The natural man cannot receive this knowledge of God. It shows this guilt and misery of man; and that no man can be delivered from the everlasting punishment he deserves, but by the unmerited mercy of the Father, through the atonement of the Son, and

by the sanctification of the Holy Ghost. All, therefore, neglect, oppose, or abuse this knowledge, unless taught of God. But where God is truly known, he will be loved, worshipped, and obeyed in proportion to that knowledge. Self-abasement, hatred of sin, indifference to the world, and kindness to our fellow-creatures, will attend it, and all true religion may be resolved into it. This knowledge is received by faith, simply believing the testimony of God as recorded in scripture. It is to be sought by reading the word of God, with earnest prayer to be taught by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. This knowledge regulates the will and affections, all our words and actions. It brings a man acquainted with God in Christ, as a Father and a Friend, in experience and communion. Thus we learn the inestimable value of the Saviour's atonement, and of the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, and are influenced to walk conscientiously in all his commandments. It brings a sinner to his proper place at the foot of the cross, as a poor, guilty, helpless worm, deserving wrath, yet expecting every thing needful from the free mercy and grace of God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Having been forgiven much, the pardoned sinner learns to love much. Thus David, having long known the Lord, desired to teach that knowledge to his beloved Solomon.

Ver. 11—21. *David gives the model and materials for the temple.*

David was now to give to Solomon, 1. A model of the temple. Moses had a pattern of the tabernacle showed him in the mount; so had David of the temple, by the immediate hand of God upon him, clearly and exactly represented to his mind. He had this pattern by the Spirit. The temple must be a sacred thing, and a type of Christ. There must be in it, not only convenience, but significance; it must not be left to man's art or invention to contrive it; but it must be framed by Divine institution. Christ the true Temple, the church the gospel temple, and heaven the everlasting temple, all are framed according to the Divine counsels, and the plan laid in the Divine wisdom, ordained before the world, for God's glory and our good. This pattern David gave to Solomon, that he might go by a certain rule. 2. Materials were provided for the most costly of the

utensils of the temple. David weighed out the quantity for each vessel. The gold for the altar of incense is particularly said to be refined gold, purer than the rest; this was typical of the intercession of Christ, than which nothing is more pure and perfect. 3. Directions which way to look for help in this great undertaking. Be not dismayed; God will help thee, and thou must look up to him in the first place. We may be sure that God, who owned our fathers, and carried them through the services of their day, will, in like manner, if we are faithful to him, never leave us, while he has any work to do in us, or by us. The same that was Joshua's encouragement, Josh. 1. 5, and Solomon's here, is given to all believers, Heb. 13. 5, He will never leave thee nor forsake thee. And good men will help thee. Thou hast good workmen, and every one in his place ready to further it. Good work is likely to go on, when all parties concerned are hearty in furthering it. Let us then hope also in God's mercy, for if we seek him, he will be found of us.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Ver. 1—9. *David, by his example and entreaty, induces the princes and people to offer willingly.*

David engaged the great men of Israel to contribute toward the building of the temple. He recommended it as an occasion for a free-will offering. What is done in works of piety and charity should be done willingly, and not by constraint; for God loves a cheerful giver. He set them a good example. This David offered, not from constraint or ostentation, not to purchase forgiveness of his sins or to merit heaven, but because "he had set his affection to the house of God," and thought he could never do enough towards promoting that good work. Those who would draw others to good, must lead themselves. Those especially who are above others, should particularly contrive to make their light shine before men, because the influence of their example is more powerful and extensive than that of other people. How generous they were appears by the sum of the contributions. The people rejoiced. Every israelite is glad to see temple work carried on with vigour. David rejoiced with great joy. It is a great revival to good men, when leaving the world, to see those they leave

behind zealous for religion. Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.

4, 7. The amount of the treasures accumulated for the temple appears incredible. According to the usual estimates, it would be nearly a thousand millions of pounds of our money. There may be a corruption or error in the numbers; we are not acquainted with the comparative value of the precious metals at that time, nor of the means for procuring them which then existed, nor as to the degree of purity of the metal; several sorts of gold are mentioned in scripture. And if the talent here mentioned was the syriac talent, the amount would be only about seven millions; if the babylonish talent, about thirty millions; or if the arabic version of 1 Chron. 22. 14, is correct, "gold a thousand talents, and silver a thousand talents," the amount would be between fifty and sixty millions. Either of these estimates brings the amount within the bounds of probability. Eastern kings and princes have, in all ages, been accustomed to lay up vast quantities of gold and silver. In Dow's "History of Hindostan," mention is made of princes possessing larger sums than either of the three last estimates. And when we consider the successful wars David had waged with the nations around, we may be satisfied that he would be able to collect very large treasures.—See *W. Brown* and *T. H. Horne*.

Ver. 10—19. *David's thanksgiving and prayer.*

We cannot form an adequate idea of the magnificence of the temple and the buildings around it, about which such immense quantities of gold and silver were employed. But the unsearchable riches of Christ exceed the splendour of the temple, infinitely more than that surpassed the meanest cottage upon earth.

Instead of boasting of these large oblations, David gave solemn thanks to the Lord. As king of Israel David was become great, powerful, and honourable; but from the Lord alone he had received all his wealth, honour, and power: this he knew, and acknowledged with grateful praise. But having contemplated the glories of the Lord, and then turning his thoughts to himself and his people, he was affected with a deep conviction of their meanness, weakness, and unworthiness. Lord, what are we that we should offer so willingly after this sort? Every way the praise belonged to him. As for them, they were strangers and sojourners, dying creatures, having forfeited every thing by sin. All they gave for the Lord's temple was his own before; if they had attempted to keep it, death would soon have removed them from it. The only use they could make of it to their real advantage, was to consecrate it to the service of Him that gave it. David was conscious of his own uprightness and willingness in this oblation, and therefore

doubted not God's merciful acceptance thereof; and with joy he beheld his people showing the same disposition. He well knew that this, as far as it was genuine, was the effect of the grace of God given unto them, and he fervently prayed that he might be kept by the same grace. Also that the hearts of them all, but especially of Solomon, might be prepared for the Lord, for every good work, and especially for the difficult, important service before them. Such is this address of David to the Lord God of Israel.

The israelites were commanded to rejoice before the Lord, that is, the Lord's ark, which was the pledge of his presence. Now this ark was a figure of Christ, and the rejoicing before it signified, that the foundation of all our joy lies in our reconciliation with God in Christ.—(56.)

Ver. 20—25. *Solomon enthroned.*

This great assembly joined with David, and bowed down their heads in adoration of God. Whoever is the mouth of the congregation, those only have the benefit who join him, not by bowing down the head so much as by lifting up the soul. In token of their joy in God, and communion with him, they feasted upon their peace-offerings in a religious manner before the Lord. They made Solomon king the second time. He having been before anointed in haste, upon occasion of Adonijah's rebellion, it was thought fit to repeat it for the greater satisfaction of the people. They anointed him unto the Lord, Zadok also was appointed to be priest in the room of Abiathar, who had lately forfeited his honour.

Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord. The Lord was, in a peculiar manner, King of Israel, 1 Sam. 12. 12. Solomon's kingdom typified the kingdom of the Messiah, and his is the throne of the Lord; for the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to him; hence he calls him his King, Psa. 2. 6. Being set on the throne of the Lord, the throne to which God called him, he prospered. They that follow the Divine guidance, may expect success by the Divine blessing. Solomon prospered.

22. As Abiathar was removed from the priesthood after David's death, it has been thought that the second anointing of Solomon was also subsequent to that event.

Ver. 26—30. *David's reign and death.*

Here is David's departure. He died full of days, riches, and honour; old, and

very rich, and much honoured both of God and man. He had enough of this world, and of the riches and honours of it, and knew when he had enough, for he was very willing to die and leave it, having said, Psa. 49. 15, God shall receive me; and Psa. 23. 4, Thou art with me. A truly good man may be full of days, riches, and honour, but will never be satisfied with them; he finds no satisfaction but in God's loving-kindness.

Shall we then seek after God, or seek our all below? What is the honour and wealth for which we are seeking? If it be riches, then place those riches on high, where you can find them at last; but let them be the true riches. Place them in Jesus Christ, and before you can be deprived of them, he must himself undergo a change.—(38.)

When we read the second book of Samuel, we could scarcely have expected to behold David appear so illustrious in his closing scene, in which every thing excellent is combined, and the people seem to have regarded him with the deepest veneration and affection. But his repentance had been as remarkable as his sin, and his conduct during his afflictions, and towards the end of his life, appears to have had more effect on his subjects than all else they had witnessed. Blessed be God, even the chief of sinners may hope for such a glorious departure, when brought to repent and flee for refuge to the Saviour's atoning blood. Let us mark the difference between the spirit and character of the man after God's own heart, living and dying, and those of worthless professors who resemble him in nothing but their sins, and try to excuse their crimes by his example. Let us also compare him with those presumptuous cailers who carp at the blemishes in scripture characters, but never adequately consider the excellency and piety they showed, living or dying. Let us then watch and pray lest we be overcome by temptation, and overtaken by sin, to the dishonour of God, and the wounding of our own consciences. When conscious of having offended, let us copy his example of repentance and patience, till having served our generation after the will of God, we are enabled to fall asleep with the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection, through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

David was an eminent type of Christ,

and he frequently spake, as concerning himself, what was applicable only to the great Antitype. This is not controverted, and opens a wide field for inquiry. It tends to illustrate many passages in the psalms and prophecies. May we discover more of the glory and grace of our Redeemer from every fresh representation of him; and while we look at his figure,

may we perceive and admire the excellency of the Divine original. In every view we discover the infinite superiority of the Saviour. Nor is it possible that any resemblance should give us an adequate conception of his dignity and glory. He is above all description, as being the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person.—(60.)

THE SECOND BOOK OF CHRONICLES.

CHAPTER I.

Solomon's offering, his prayer, and choice of wisdom—His strength and wealth.

Solomon began his reign with a public pious visit to God's altar. Magistrates are likely to do well for themselves and their people, when they thus take God with them at their setting out. But, alas! even in christian countries such scenes are seldom beheld. The presence and blessing of the Lord gives strength, honour, happiness, and stability; and to whom he hath given much, from them he requires the more.

He prayed to God. This, with the answer to it, we had before, 1 Kings 3. 5, &c. He received a gracious answer to this prayer. Wisdom is a gift that God gives as freely and liberally as any gift, to those who value it, wrestle for it, and will resolve to make use of it; and he upbraids not the poor petitioners with their folly, James 1. 5. God's grace shall never be wanting to those who sincerely desire to know and do their duty. God gave Solomon the wealth and honour which he did not ask for. Those that pursue present things most earnestly, are most likely to miss them; while those that refer themselves to the providence of God, if they have not the most of those things, have the most comfort in them. Those that make this world their end, come short of the other, and are disappointed in this also; but those that make the other world their end, shall not only obtain that, and full satisfaction in it, but shall take as much as is good for them of this world in their way. Let us then improve our present talents, let us seek heavenly blessings, and let us be contented without those great things which men generally covet, but which commonly prove fatal snares to the soul.

(See remarks on 1 Kings 3. 4—15.)

CHAPTER II.

Solomon's message to Hiram respecting the temple—His treaty with Hiram.

Here is Solomon's embassy to Hiram, king of Tyre, to engage his assistance in the prosecution of his designs. The purport of his message is much the same as in 1 Kings 5, only here it is more largely set forth. Solomon represents his design in building the temple for a place of religious worship, that all the offerings God had appointed for the honour of his name might be offered up there. The house was built that it might be dedicated to God, and used in his service; we should aim that all our havings and doings may be to the glory of God. He informs Hiram as to particular services that were there to be performed. The mysteries of the true religion, unlike those of the gentile superstitions, coveted not concealment.

Solomon endeavours to possess Hiram with great and high thoughts of the God of Israel. Idols are nothing, princes are little, and both are under the control of the God of Israel; therefore the house must be great. Yet, be it ever so great, it cannot be a habitation for the great God. Let not Hiram think that the God of Israel, like the gods of the nations, dwells in temples made with hands, Acts 17. 24. No, the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. It is intended only for the priests and worshippers, that they may have a fit place wherein to burn sacrifice before him. He looked upon himself, though a mighty prince, as unworthy the honour of being employed in this great work. It is part of the wisdom wherein we ought to walk toward them that are without, carefully to guard against all misapprehension, which any thing we say or do may occasion concerning God; so Solomon does in his treaty with Hiram.

But he deemed it no impropriety to speak freely upon religious subjects, in treating with a heathen king about what to him was secular business. We should not be afraid or ashamed to embrace every opportunity to speak of God, and to impress others with a deep sense of the importance of his favour and service. It is pleasant to observe how the friendship of pious men brings those that were afar off to love and worship the Saviour.

The requests he makes to Hiram are particularly set down. The house must be wonderfully great, very stately, and magnificent, no cost spared, nor any contrivance wanting in it. Here is Solomon's engagement to maintain the workmen, to give them so much wheat and barley, so much wine and oil. He did not feed his workmen with bread and water, but with plenty. They that employ labourers ought to take care they are not only well paid, but provided with that which is wholesome and fit for them. Let rich masters do for their poor workmen as they would be done by.

Here is the return Hiram made to Solomon's embassy, in which he shows great respect for Solomon, and readiness to serve him. He congratulates Israel on having such a king as Solomon. He blesses God for raising up such a successor to David. Now that the people of Israel kept close to the law and worship of God, the neighbouring nations were willing to be instructed by them in the true religion; as the israelites had been willing in the days of their apostasy, to be infected with the idolatries and superstitions of their neighbours. Possessions and authority are given to men for the sake of others. A wise and pious king is an evidence of the Lord's special love for his people. Who then can express the greatness of God's love to his believing people, in giving them his only begotten Son to be their Prince and their Saviour. Let us then be helpful to one another in spreading the knowledge of his name and his truth.

(See 1 Kings 5.)

CHAPTER III.

The building of the temple.

There is a more particular account of the building of the temple in 1 Kings 6. 7. than in Chronicles. The temple was built at Jerusalem, for that was the place

in which God chose to put his name. It must be on mount Moriah, which, some think, was the place where Abraham offered Isaac, Gen. 22. 2. That was typical of Christ's sacrifice of himself; therefore fitly was the temple, which was a type of him, built there. It must be where the Lord appeared to David, and answered him by fire, 1 Chron. 21. 18, 26. There atonement was made once: in remembrance of that, there atonement must still be made. It must be in the place David had prepared, not only which he had purchased, but which he had fixed on by Divine direction. It was Solomon's wisdom not to inquire for what might appear a more convenient place, but to acquiesce in the appointment of God. The time when it was begun was not till the fourth year of Solomon's reign. The three first years were employed in the necessary preparations for it.

The cherubim were designed, it is likely, to represent angels. Each wing extended five cubits, so that the wings of the two extended twenty cubits, the breadth of the most holy place. They stood on their feet as servants, their faces inward toward the ark. They were not set there to be adored, for then they would have been made sitting, as on a throne, and their faces toward their worshippers, but as attendants on the invisible God. We must not worship angels, but we must worship with angels; for we are come into communion with them, Heb. 12. 22, and must do the will of God as the angels do. The thought that we are worshipping Him before whom the angels cover their faces, will help to inspire us with reverence in all our approaches to God.

The vail that parted between the temple and the most holy place, denoted the darkness of that dispensation, and the distance at which the worshippers were kept. But, at the death of Christ, this vail was rent; for through him we are made nigh, and have boldness not only to look on, but to enter into the holiest.

The pillars speak, 1. Jachin, the faithful purpose of God. He is faithful who promised. This includes his purpose; his purpose of love, his promise, his unchangeable faithfulness in all. 2. Boaz, the power of Christ, his almighty power. Depend, rest, and stay thyself upon this almighty power, which is able to do above what we are able to ask or think. Can

the Lord pardon our sins, heal our backslidings? Yes. Take these both together. Love and power put together is a support firm and safe enough for faith to rest upon. Lean and rest upon both these pillars. If thou art not assured of his purpose, yet rest and stay thyself upon his power.—(49.)

Full instructions enable us to go about our work with certainty, and to proceed therein with comfort. Blessed be God, the scriptures are sufficient to render the man of God thoroughly furnished for every good work. But if we prefer our own devices to God's institutions, we shall be condemned for presumption as well as disobedience. Let us search the scriptures daily, beseeching the Lord to enable us to understand, believe, submit to, and obey his word, that our work and our way may be made plain, and that all may be begun, continued, and ended in him. Beholding God in Christ, his true temple, infinitely more glorious than that of Solomon, may we become a spiritual house, a habitation of God through the Spirit.

10. The most generally received opinions respecting the cherubim are, either that they were hieroglyphics of the Trinity, as they appear in the works of creation, providence, and redemption; or that they represented the character and office of the ministers of religion; or were descriptive of the general history of the church. The subject is intricate, but one leading idea runs through all the interpretations, namely, that they have evident reference to the plan of redemption, for they are allowed to be descriptive either of its Divine authors, its Divinely commissioned human instruments, or its general history.—*W. Brown.* See also Ezek. 1.

CHAPTER IV.

The furniture of the temple.

Here is a further account of the furniture of God's house. All these things, except the brazen altar, were described more largely, 1 Kings 7. Both without doors and within, there was that which typified the grace of the gospel, and shadowed out good things to come, of which the substance is Christ.

There was the brazen altar. The making of this was not mentioned in the book of Kings. On this all the sacrifices were offered, and it sanctified the gift. This altar was four times as long and broad as that which Moses made in the tabernacle. God had greatly enlarged the borders of Israel; it was therefore fit that they should enlarge his altars. Our returns should bear some proportion to

our receivings. It was ten cubits high, so that the people who worshipped in the courts might see the sacrifices burnt, and their eye might affect their heart with sorrow for sin: It is of the Lord's mercies that I am not thus consumed, and that this is accepted as an expiation of my guilt. They might thus be led to consider the great Sacrifice which should be offered in the fulness of time, to take away sin, and abolish death, which the blood of bulls and goats could not possibly do. And with the smoke of the sacrifices their hearts might ascend to heaven in holy desires towards God and his favour. In all our devotions we must keep the eye of faith fixed upon Christ, the great Propitiation. How they went up to this altar, and carried the sacrifices up to it, we are not told; it probably was by a plain ascent like a hill.

There was the molten sea. The Holy Ghost by this signified our great gospel privilege, that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin, 1 John 1. 7. To us there is a fountain opened for all believers, who are spiritual priests, Rev. 1. 5, 6, nay, for all the inhabitants of Jerusalem to wash in, from sin, which is uncleanness. There is a fulness of merit in Jesus Christ, for all those who by faith apply themselves to Him for the purifying of their consciences, that they may serve the living God, Heb. 9. 14. Also our great gospel duty, to cleanse ourselves by true repentance from all the pollutions of the flesh, and the corruption that is in the world, is signified. Our hearts must be sanctified, or we cannot sanctify the name of God. They that draw nigh to God, must cleanse their hands, and purify their hearts, Jam. 4. 8. If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me, John 13. 10; and he that is washed, still needs to wash his feet, to renew his repentance, whenever he goes in to minister.

The laver was never covered up, but always open. The fountain is set open, Zech. 13. 1. The blood of Christ is offered; the Lord gives thee liberty to wash in this sea. It is not a fountain sealed, but set open in regard of the general offer of the gospel unto all. Washing in this spiritual sea is nothing else but believing and exercising faith in the blood of Christ. The greater thy defilements are, the more need thou hast of Jesus Christ, and of his blood to cleanse thee, and wash thee from thy sins.—(49.)

There was a golden altar, on which they burned incense. It is probable that this was enlarged in proportion to the brazen altar. Christ who, once for all, made atonement for sin, ever lives, making intercession, in virtue of that atonement. May we walk in the light of his word, feast upon the provisions of his house, and be constrained by his love to live no longer to ourselves, but to Him who died for us, and rose again.

The furniture of the temple, compared with that of the tabernacle, plainly showed that God's church would be enlarged, and his worshippers multiplied. Blessed be God, there is abundant sufficiency in Christ for all that come. May his preached gospel hold him forth to all the nations of the earth, as crucified for sinners, and may his Spirit prepare the hearts of all to welcome his salvation; for all things else are now ready.

3. The original word here is "bekarim," oxen; in 1 Kings 7. it is "pekaim," knops in the form of colocynths; the difference arises from a change of letters. Some other variations from the description of the temple in the book of Kings appear to have arisen in the same manner; and circumstances mentioned in the one are omitted in the other.

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1—10. *The ark placed in the temple.*

It was fit that the ark should be brought in with great solemnity. All the other vessels were made new, and larger than they had been in the tabernacle; but the ark, the mercy-seat, and the cherubims, were the same; the presence and the grace of God are the same in little assemblies as they are in large ones; in the poor condition of the church, as in its prosperous estate. Wherever two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, there is he as truly present, as if there were two or three thousand. The ark was brought in, attended by a great assembly of the elders of Israel. And "There it is unto this day:" not the day when this book was written after the captivity, but when that was written, out of which this history was transcribed. Or, it was there, so it might better be read, unto this day, the day of Jerusalem's desolations, that fatal day, *Psa. 137. 7.*

The ark was a type of Christ, and, as such, a token of the presence of God. That gracious promise, *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world,* does, in effect, bring the ark into our reli-

gious assemblies, if we by faith and prayer plead that promise; and this we should be most earnest for; Lord, if thy presence go not with us, wherefore should we go up? The temple itself, if Christ leave it, is a desolate place, *Matt. 23. 38.* The eye of our faith must in every service be directed to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, as rendering us and all we do, accepted, to the glory of God the Father. The establishment of the public worship of God, according to his institution, and with the tokens of his presence, is, and ought to be matter of great joy to any people. When Christ is formed in a soul, the law written in the heart, the ark of the covenant settled there, so that it becomes the temple of the Holy Ghost, there is true satisfaction in that soul. And whatever we have the comfort of, we must, by the sacrifice of praise, give God the glory of it, and not be straitened therein; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. If God favour us with his presence, we must honour him with our services, the best we have.

Ver. 11—14. *The temple filled with glory.*

God took possession of the temple; he filled it with a cloud. Thus he signified his acceptance of this temple to be the same to him, that the tabernacle of Moses was, and assured them that he would be the same in it; it was by a cloud he made his public entry into that, *Exod. 40. 34.* He took possession of it when the priests were come out of the holy place. This is the way of giving possession. All must come out, that the rightful owner may come in. Would we have God dwell in our hearts, we must leave room for him; let every thing else give way. Upon this occasion, the whole of the priests attended, not any one particular course.

The priests could not stand to minister, by reason of the cloud, which, as it was an evidence that the law made men priests that had infirmity, so it was a plain intimation that the levitical priesthood should cease, and stand no longer to minister, when the Messiah should come, in whom the fulness of the Godhead should dwell bodily. In him the glory of God dwelt among us, but covered with a cloud. The Word was made flesh; and when he comes to his temple, like a refiner's fire, who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? *Mal. 3. 1, 2.* May he prepare us for, and

bring us to the land of perfect knowledge, purity, and happiness.
(*Read 1 Kings 8. 1—21, with this chapter.*)

CHAPTER VI.

Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple.

Solomon prayed the consecration prayer, by which the temple was made a figure of Christ, the great Mediator, through whom we are to offer all our prayers, and to expect all God's favours, and to whom we are to look in every thing wherein we have to do with God. The particulars of this prayer are noticed 1 Kings 8. The concluding words, ver. 41, 42, which are not in the book of Kings, are taken, with variations, from Psalm 132, which probably was composed with reference to the former removal of the ark.

The order of Solomon's prayer is to be observed. First and chiefly, he prays for repentance and forgiveness, which is the chief blessing, and the only solid foundation of other mercies: he then prays for temporal mercies; thereby teaching us what to mind and desire principally in our prayers; which also Christ hath taught us in his perfect pattern and form of prayer, where there is but one prayer for outward, and all the rest are for spiritual blessings.—(54.)

Solomon pleads the promises of God to David, which were mercies to him, his great support and comfort in all his troubles. We may plead, as Solomon does here, with an eye to Christ. We deserve that God should turn away his face, that he should reject us and our prayers; but we come to thee in the name of the Lord Jesus, thine Anointed, thy Messiah, so the word is; thy Christ, so the greek version. Him thou hearest always, and wilt never turn away his face. We have no righteousness of our own to plead, but, Lord, remember the mercies of David thy servant. Christ is God's Servant, Isa. 42. 1, and is called David, Hos. 3. 5. Lord, remember his merits, accept of us on the account of them. Remember his tender concern for his Father's honour, and man's salvation; what he did and suffered from that principle. Remember the promises of the everlasting covenant, which free grace has made to us in Christ, which are called the sure mercies of David, Isa. 55. 3, and Acts 13. 34. This must be all our desire, and all our hope, all our prayer, and all our plea, for it is all our salvation.

The temple typified the human nature of Christ, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; the ark typified his meritorious obedience and sufferings, whereby the holy law was magnified; and through which believing sinners have access to a reconciled God, and communion with him. Jehovah hath made our nature his resting-place for ever, in the person of Emmanuel, and through him he dwells with, and delights in his church of redeemed sinners.

It was upon the account of the blood our Redeemer shed on the cross, that the Father was pleased all fulness should dwell in him as an *original temple*, to serve the purposes of that great reconciling work undertaken by him, the raising up of multitudes of temples, all sprung from this one, in this world of ours, that God might dwell with man on earth, that he might give gifts, that of his Spirit especially, even to the rebellious, also that the Lord God might have his temple and dwell with them, Psa. 68. 18.—(40.)

May our hearts become his resting-place; may Christ dwell therein by faith, consecrating them as his temples, and shedding abroad his love therein. May the Father look upon us in and through his Anointed, and may he remember and bless us in all things, according to his mercy to sinners, in and through him.

15. It is no obscure hint that here is given of the spaciousness of the heavenly regions, when it is said, that even heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain him. How vast scope is given to our thinking minds, to conceive heavens above heavens, encircling one another, till we have quite tired our faculties, and yet we know not how far short we are of the utmost verge! And when our Lord is said to have ascended above all heavens, Eph. 4. 10, whose arithmetic will suffice to tell how many they are! —Howe.

(*See remarks on 1 Kings 8.*)

CHAPTER VII.

God's answer to Solomon's prayer.

God immediately made a gracious return to Solomon's prayer. The fire came down from heaven, and consumed the sacrifice, ver. 1. In this way God testified his acceptance of Moses, Lev. 9. 24, of Gideon, Judg. 6. 21, of David, 1 Chron. 21. 26, of Elijah, 1 Kings 18. 38, and, in general, to accept the burnt-sacrifice, is, in the hebrew phrase, to turn it to ashes, Psa. 20. 3. The fire came down, not upon killing of

the sacrifices, but praying the prayer. This fire intimated that God was, 1. Glorious in himself; for our God is a consuming fire, terrible even in his holy places. This fire breaking forth, as it is probable, out of the thick darkness, made it the more terrible, as on mount Sinai, Exod. 24. 16, 17. The sinners in Zion had reason to be afraid at this sight, and to say, Who among us shall dwell near this devouring fire? Isa. 33. 14. And yet, 2. Gracious to Israel; for this fire, which might justly have consumed them, fastened upon the sacrifice offered in their stead, and consumed that; by which God signified to them, that he accepted their offerings, and that his anger was turned away from them.

Let us apply this to the sufferings of Christ; when it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and put him to grief, in that he showed his good-will to men, having laid on him the iniquity of us all. His death was our life, and he was made sin and a curse that we might inherit righteousness and a blessing. That sacrifice was consumed that we might escape: Here am I, let these go away, John 18. 8. Also to the sanctification of the Spirit, who descends like fire, burning up our lusts and corruptions, those beasts that must be sacrificed, or we are undone; and kindling in our souls a holy fire of pious and devout affections, always to be kept burning on the altar of the heart. The surest evidence of God's acceptance of our prayers, is the descent of this holy fire upon us; Did not our hearts burn within us? Luke 24. 32. As a further evidence that God accepted Solomon's prayer, still the glory of the Lord filled the house. The heart which is thus filled with a holy awe and reverence of the Divine glory, in consequence of God's manifesting himself in his greatness, and in his goodness, is thereby owned as a living temple.

The mercies of God to sinners are communicated in a manner suited to impress all who receive them, with profound reverence of his majesty and holiness. The people worshipped and praised God. When he manifests himself as a consuming Fire to sinners, his people can rejoice in him as their Light. Nay, they had reason to say that in this God was good. It is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, but the sacrifice in our stead, for which we are to be very thankful. And whoever beholds with true faith, the

Saviour agonizing and dying for man's sin, will by that view find his godly sorrow enlarged, his hatred of sin increased, his soul made more watchful, and be earnest that his life shall be more holy.

Solomon prosperously effected all he designed, for adorning both God's house and his own. Those who begin with the service of God, are likely to go on successfully in their own affairs. It was Solomon's praise, that what he undertook, he went through with; it was by the grace of God that he prospered in it. God set before Solomon death as well as life, the curse as well as the blessing. He supposes it possible, that though they had this temple built to the honour of God, yet they might be drawn aside to worship other gods, ver. 19. He knew their proneness to that sin. He threatens it as certain, that if they did so, it would certainly be the ruin of both church and state. This sanctuary would be no sanctuary to them, to protect them from the judgments of God. Let us then stand in awe, and sin not. Let us fear the Lord's displeasure, hope in his mercy, and walk in his commandments.

(See remarks on 1 Kings 8. and 9.)

CHAPTER VIII.

Solomon's buildings, and trade with foreign countries.

This account of Solomon's buildings is also given 1 Kings 9. 10—24. The Divine Providence gratified Solomon, and gave him success, not only in all that he needed to build, and that was for his advantage to build, but in all that he had a mind to build. So indulgent a Father God is sometimes to the lawful desires of his children that serve him.

One reason why Solomon built a palace on purpose for the queen, and removed her and her court to it, was, because he thought it by no means proper that she should dwell in the house of David, considering that it had been a place of great piety. Though Solomon had not zeal and courage enough to suppress and punish what was amiss there, yet he so far consulted the honour of his father's memory, that he would not suffer that place to be profaned, where the ark of God had been, and where holy David had prayed and sung. Not that all the places where the ark had been, were so holy as never to be put to a common use;

but the place where it had been so long, and had been so publicly attended on, was not fit to be the place of so much evil, as was to be found, too probably, in the court that Pharaoh's daughter kept. It sometimes requires more wisdom and resolution to govern a family in the fear of God, than to govern a kingdom with reputation. The difficulty is increased when a man has a hinderance instead of a help meet in the wife of his bosom.

Solomon kept up the holy sacrifices, according to the law of Moses. In vain had the altar been built, in vain had fire come down from heaven, if sacrifices had not been constantly brought. Spiritual sacrifices are required of us, which we are to bring daily and weekly; it is good to be in a settled method of devotion. He also kept up the holy songs there, according to the law of David, as the duty of every day required. He observed God's laws, and then all obeyed his orders. When the service of the temple was put into good order, it is said, The house of the Lord was perfected. The work was the main matter, not the place; the temple was unfinished till all this was done.

Canaan was a rich country, and yet must send to Ophir for gold. The Israelites were a wise and understanding people, but must be beholden to the king of Tyre for men that had knowledge of the seas. Yet Canaan was God's peculiar land, and Israel God's peculiar people; which teaches us that grace, and not gold, is the best riches; and acquaintance with God and his law, not with arts and sciences, the best knowledge. Leaving the children of this world to scramble for the toys of this world, may we, as the children of God, lay up our treasure in heaven, that where our treasure is, our hearts also may be.

(See remarks on 1 Kings 9.)

CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 1—12. *Visit of the queen of Sheba to Solomon.*

This history has been considered, 1 Kings 10; yet because our Saviour has proposed it as an example to us in our inquiries after him, Matt. 12. 42, we must not pass it over, without observing that those who know the worth of true wisdom, will grudge no pains or cost to obtain it. The queen of Sheba put herself

to a great deal of trouble and expense, to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and yet, learning from him to serve God, and do her duty, she thought herself well paid for her pains. Heavenly wisdom is that pearl of great price, for the purchase of which, if we part with all, we make a good bargain.

We ought to rejoice, and give God thanks for the gifts, graces, and usefulness of others. The queen of Sheba blessed God for the honour he put upon Solomon, and the favour he did to Israel in advancing him to the throne. By giving God the praise of the prosperity of others, we share the comfort of it; by envying the prosperity of others, we lose the comfort even of our own. The happiness both of king and kingdom, this queen traced up to the fountain of all bliss—the Divine favour. Those mercies are doubly sweet, in which we taste the kindness and good-will of God, as our God.

It becomes those who are wise and good, to be generous according to their place and power. The queen of Sheba was so to Solomon, Solomon was so to her. They both knew how to value wisdom, and therefore neither were covetous of their money, but cultivated the acquaintance, and confirmed the friendship they had contracted, by mutual presents. Our Lord Jesus has promised to give us all our desire: Ask, and it shall be given you. Let us study what we shall render to Him, and not think any thing too much to do, suffer, or part with for him.

12. See 1 Kings 10. 13, which appears the correct reading.

Ver. 13—31. *Solomon's riches, and his death.*

The imports here mentioned would indicate that prosperity enervated the minds of Solomon and his subjects, to the love of things curious and uncommon, though useless in themselves. True wisdom and happiness are inseparably connected; but no such alliance exists between wealth and the enjoyment of the things of this life. Let us then acquaint ourselves with the Saviour, that we may find rest for our souls.

We have here Solomon on his throne, and Solomon in his grave; for the throne would not secure him from the grave. Here is Solomon *reigning in wealth and power*, in ease and fulness, such as could never since be paralleled: for the most illustrious of the great princes of the earth were famed for their wars, whereas

Solomon reigned forty years in profound peace. The promise was fulfilled, that God would give him riches and honour, such as no kings have had or shall have. There was not the like in any kingdom. The lustre wherein he appeared, was typical of the spiritual glory of the kingdom of the Messiah, and but a faint representation of His throne, which is above every throne. Solomon's pomp was all artificial; therefore our Saviour prefers the natural beauty of the lilies of the field before it, Matt. 6. 29. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Never any prince had such presents as Solomon had. All the kings of the earth brought him presents, that is, all in those parts of the world, because they coveted his acquaintance and friendship. Herein he was a type of Christ, to whom, as soon as he was born, the wise men of the east brought presents, gold, frankincense, and myrrh, Matt. 2. 11, and to whom all that are about him must bring presents, Psa. 76. 11; Rom. 12. 1. Never any prince was so renowned for wisdom, so courted, so consulted, so admired. The applications made to Solomon to hear his wisdom, shame and condemn men's general contempt of Christ and his gospel. Though therein are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, yet none of the princes of this world desire to know them, for they are foolishness to them, 1 Cor. 2. 8, 14.

Here is Solomon *dying*, and leaving all his wealth and power, not to one concerning whom he knew not whether he would be a wise man or a fool, but who he knew would be a fool! Eccl. 2. 18, 19. This was not only vanity, but vexation of spirit. Neither authority, wealth, magnificence, nor wisdom, can ward off or prepare for the stroke of death. But thanks be to God who giveth victory to the true believer, even over this dreaded enemy, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

No mention is here made of Solomon's departure from God in his latter days. Though he fell, yet we trust he was not utterly cast down. Perhaps his sin is not again recorded, because it was repented of, and pardoned. Scripture silence sometimes speaks. When God pardons sin, he casts it behind his back, and remembers it no more. But let us be careful to avoid the mistakes and falls of others. Let us follow others as far as they follow Christ, but no further,

whatever their reputation in the church may be.

26. The covenant with Abraham, Gen. 15. 18, was now realized in its full extent of territory.

28. Here was the beginning of Solomon's disobedience, and we see how one sin leads to another. He established a body of cavalry, which was forbidden, Deut. 17. 16, and horses would be obtained from Egypt, with which land the israelites were forbidden to have intercourse. The intercourse with Egypt led to the marriage with Pharaoh's daughter; then followed marriages with other strange women. These persuaded Solomon to build temples for their idolatrous worship, and afterwards for his own idolatry.—See *Warburton*.

(See 1 Kings 10. and 11.)

CHAPTER X.

Rehoboam succeeds Solomon—The ten tribes revolt from him.

This chapter is the same as 1 Kings 12. 1—19, to which the reader can refer.

Moderate counsels are generally wisest and best. Gentleness will do what violence will not do. Most people love to be accosted mildly. Good words cost nothing but a little self-denial, and yet they purchase great things. God often fulfils the counsels of his own wisdom, by infatuating men, and giving them up to the counsels of their own folly. No more needs to be done to ruin men, than to leave them to themselves, and their own pride and passion. Thus whatever the devices and designs of men are, God is, by all, doing his own work, and fulfilling the word which he has spoken, no iota or tittle of which shall fall to the ground. This does not at all excuse Rehoboam's folly, nor lessen the guilt of his haughtiness and passion.

No man can bequeath his prosperity to his heirs any more than his wisdom; though our children will generally be affected by our conduct, whether good or bad. Let us then seek those good things which will be our own for ever; and crave the blessing of God upon our posterity, in preference to wealth or worldly exaltation. Let us expect vexations and changes on earth, and learn to depend upon the power, faithfulness, and love of that God, who in correcting his children, or punishing his enemies, will never fail of performing his promises to those that trust in him. But are we not disposed to regard the holy law of God as a grievous yoke? his wisdom, righteousness, truth, goodness, and mercy are infinite; his yoke is easy, and his burden light, and the whole blame of

our uneasiness rests upon ourselves alone. This should teach us to humble ourselves, and to pray continually, Turn thou me, and so shall I be turned.

(See 1 Kings 12.)

CHAPTER XI.

Ver. 1—12. *Rehoboam is forbidden to make war against Israel—He strengthens his kingdom.*

Rehoboam saw it was to no purpose to think of reducing those that were revolted. A few good words might have prevented their defection; but now all the force of his kingdom cannot bring them back. He fortified his frontiers, and many of the principal cities of his kingdom, which, in Solomon's peaceable reign, no care had been taken for the defence of. He furnished them with provisions and arms. Because God forbade him to fight, he did not sit down and say that he would do nothing for the public safety, if he might not do that, but he prudently provided against an attack. They that may not be conquerors, yet may be builders. And it is in vain to contend with the purpose of God when made known to us. Even those who are destitute of true faith will at times pay some regard to the word of God, and be restrained by it from actions to which they were inclined.

Ver. 13—23. *The priests and levites find refuge in Judah—Rehoboam's family.*

Rehoboam was strengthened by the accession of the priests and levites, and all the devout and pious israelites, even all that were true to their God and their religion. Jeroboam cast them off; he set up such a way of worship as they could not, in conscience, comply with, which obliged them to withdraw from his altar, and at the same time he would not allow them to go up to Jerusalem, to worship at the altar there; so that he totally cast them off from executing the priest's office. No marvel if he that cast off God, cast off his ministers. They would not serve his gods, nor worship the golden image which he had set up. Thus the levites were driven out of all their cities, except those in Judah and Benjamin. Their maintenance had been well settled, and yet they lost it. It was a comfort to them the law so often reminded them that the Lord was their inheritance, and they should find him such, when they were turned out of their houses and possessions. No secular advantages should

draw us, or detain us, when we are in danger of making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. In times of prevailing ungodliness and public disturbances, the ministers of God will be exposed to peculiar trials; they must act contrary to their consciences, or expose themselves to loss and peril. This is the time when God puts the sincerity of professed faith and love to the proof. It is indeed honourable to God, and convincing to man, when ministers readily renounce their worldly interest, and stand up boldly for the cause of God.

They came to Judah and Jerusalem. Where should God's priests and levites be, but where his altar was? It was a mercy to them that they had a place of refuge. It was an evidence that they loved their work better than their maintenance, in that they left their possessions because they were restrained from serving God there, and cast themselves upon God's providence, in coming to a place where they might have the free enjoyment of God's ordinances. Poverty in the way of duty is to be chosen rather than plenty in the way of sin.

When the priests and levites came to Jerusalem, the devout, pious israelites followed them. Such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel, left the inheritance of their fathers, and went to Jerusalem, that they might have free access to the altar of God, and be out of the temptation to worship the calves. That is best for us, which is best for our souls; in all our choices, advantages for religion must take place of all outward conveniences. Where God's faithful priests are, his faithful people should be. And it was the wisdom and praise of Rehoboam and his people that they bid them welcome. Conscientious refugees will bring a blessing with them to the countries that entertain them, as they leave a curse behind with those who expel them. For when it has been proved that we are willing to renounce our worldly interests, so far as we are called to it for the sake of Christ and his gospel, we have one good evidence that we are truly his disciples.

They not only strengthened the kingdom of Judah by the addition of so many persons, but by their piety and their prayers they procured a blessing upon the kingdom which was a sanctuary to them: see Zech. 12. 5. It is the interest of a nation to protect and encourage re-

ligion and religious people. They made Rehoboam and his people strong three years; so long they walked in the way of David and Solomon, their good way; but when they forsook that, and threw themselves out of God's favour and protection, they could no longer help to strengthen them. We retain strength while we cleave to God and our duty, and no longer.

Rehoboam was weakened by indulging in his pleasures; but several of Rehoboam's sons are here named as men of note, and active men. He thought it wisdom to disperse them throughout the countries of Judah and Benjamin, either that they might not be rivals with Abijah, whom he designed for his successor; or because he could repose confidence in them, for preserving public peace and safety. Whatever was his motive, it was deemed good policy by his contemporaries. It is indeed well when those who begin foolishly, grow wiser by experience; but that wisdom is of little value which is engrossed by secular interests to the neglect of the soul, through the indulgence of worldly lusts, and departing from the living God.

(See 1 Kings 12. 25—33.)

CHAPTER XII.

*Rehoboam, forsaking the Lord, is punished—
His reign and death.*

Rehoboam and his people left God. He forsook the law of the Lord, and so, in effect, forsook God, and all Israel with him. He had three happy years when he walked in the way of David and Solomon, but he grew remiss in the worship of God. As long as he thought his throne tottered, he kept to his duty; but when he thought that it stood firm, he thought he had no more occasion for religion. Thus the prosperity of fools destroys them. When men prosper, and are in no apprehension of troubles, they are ready to say to God, Depart from us. When he was become so strong that he supposed he had nothing to apprehend from Jeroboam, he cast off his profession of godliness. It is a very common, but a most lamentable case, that men, who in distress or danger, or apparently near death, seem much engaged in seeking and serving God, throw aside all their religion when they have received a merciful deliverance. But the Lord can soon arrest them by renewed afflictions; and ungod-

ly prosperity serves only to increase vain confidence, and to invite rapacity.

God quickly brought troubles upon Judah, to awaken them, and to recover them to repentance, before their hearts were hardened. It was but in the fourth year of Rehoboam that they began to corrupt themselves, and, in the fifth year, the king of Egypt came up against them. All the fenced cities of Judah, which Rehoboam had lately fortified and garrisoned, and on which he relied much for the safety of his kingdom, fell into the hands of the enemy. The whole was obviously of the Lord, because Judah had transgressed against him. Lest they should not understand the meaning of his providence, God sent a prophet, who told them plainly the reason why Shishak prevailed. God never leaves any, till they first leave him. The king and princes humbled themselves before God for their iniquity, penitently acknowledged the sin, and patiently accepted the punishment of it, saying, The Lord is righteous. Thus it becomes us, when we are under the rebukes of providence, to justify God, and judge ourselves.

God in mercy prevented the destruction upon the brink of which they now were. The Lord can dispose the hardest to compassion, the most rapacious to moderation, the most impious to fear profaning sacred things. He rules men as he does the raging ocean, saying, Hitherto shalt thou go, and no further. Those who acknowledge God righteous in afflicting them, shall find him gracious. They that humble themselves before him, shall find favour with him. So ready is the God of mercy to take the first occasion to show mercy. If we have humbled hearts under humbling providences, the affliction has done its work; it shall either be removed, or the property of it altered.

God gave deliverance for a little while. They reformed but partially; and as their reformation was, so was their deliverance. Yet it is said, in respect of piety, there were good things in Judah; good ministers, good people, good families, who were made better by the calamities of their country. In times of great corruption and degeneracy, it is some comfort if there are a few among whom good things are found. If things do not go so well as we could wish, yet we have reason to take notice of it with

thankfulness if they go better than was to have been expected, better than formerly, and better than we deserved. We should own God's goodness, if he do but grant us some deliverance. Yet God left them to smart sorely by the hand of Shishak, both in their liberty and in their wealth. The more God's service is compared with other services, the more reasonable and easy it will appear. Whatever difficulties or hardships we may think exist in the way of obedience, it is better a thousand times to go through them, than to expose ourselves to the punishment of disobedience. Are the laws of temperance thought hard? The effects of intemperance will be found much harder. The service of God is perfect liberty; the service of our lusts is perfect slavery.

The history of Rehoboam's reign is here concluded. There were frequent skirmishes between his subjects and Jeroboam's; but he held his own, and reigned; and, as it should seem, did not so grossly forsake the law of God as he had done. But he was never rightly fixed in his religion. He never quite cast off God; yet he did evil in that he prepared not; he engaged not his heart to seek the Lord. See what the fault is. He did not *serve* the Lord, because he did not *seek* the Lord. He did not pray, as Solomon, for wisdom and grace; he did not consult the word of God, did not seek to that as his oracle, nor take directions from that. He made nothing of his religion, because he did not set his heart to it, nor ever came up to a steady resolution in it. He did evil, because he never was determined for that which is good. Those are easily drawn by Satan to evil, who waver in that which is good, who never make religion their business. Where formality and hypocrisy prove a man's highest attainments, a life of vanity and vexation will be closed by a miserable death. May the Lord prepare our hearts unto himself, that we may serve him with perseverance and delight while we live, and have a strong consolation and joyful hope when called to walk through the valley of the shadow of death; and so have abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The lubims are supposed to be the libyans who dwelt on the east of Egypt, along the shore of the Mediterranean. The sukkiims, the same as the troglodites, who inhabited the west shore

of the Red sea. The cushim, or ethiopians, were from the south of Egypt.

9. One of the large palaces at Carnac was partly built by Shishak; and on a wall standing in 1828, was discovered a sculpture representing that monarch, dragging thirty conquered monarchs or chieftains. One has hieroglyphics upon his shield, denoting Jondaha Malek, which means, king of Judah, and doubtless represents Rehoboam.

(See 1 Kings 14. 21—31.)

CHAPTER XIII.

Abijah's reign over Judah—Trusting in God, he overcomes Jeroboam.

God gave Abijah leave to engage with Jeroboam, who, it is probable, was now the aggressor. Jeroboam and his people, by apostasy and idolatry, merited the severe punishment which Abijah was permitted to execute upon them. Abijah is allowed to chastise him, and it does not appear that he intended to do more; whereas Rehoboam aimed at the reduction of the ten tribes, contrary to the counsel of God. Jeroboam's army was double in number to that of Abijah, for he had ten tribes to raise an army out of—Abijah had but two. Yet the inferior number proved victorious, for the battle is not always to the strong, nor the cause to the majority. The number of troops brought into the field was immense; but when every man was a soldier, small kingdoms could raise vast armies upon occasion. Before Abijah fought, he reasoned with them, to persuade them to desist from fighting against the house of David. It is good to try reason before we use force. Fair reasoning may do much good, and prevent a great deal of mischief. How forcible are right words!

Though Jeroboam seems to have been the aggressor, Abijah had carried the war into his country. The ground of Abijah's address was truth, but there was much false colouring in his method of stating it. He dwelt too much on the covenant of royalty made with David in behalf of his posterity. This, except as it related to the promised Messiah, was conditional, and neither Solomon, Rehoboam, nor himself had attended to the stipulations. A covenant of salt means a covenant solemnly ratified by a sacrifice and a feast, at both of which salt was used, that is to say, an unchangeable covenant. But the Lord was not thus engaged to continue the kingdom of all Israel to David's posterity. Abijah knew that Jeroboam had a grant from God of the ten tribes.

Abijah's words were more forcible when he exposed the apostasy and idolatry of the kingdom of Israel, and the manner in which any worthless fellow was made a priest who brought the sacrifice appointed by way of consecration. These things drew down punishment upon Jeroboam and his adherents. But what Abijah urged concerning the maintenance of true religion in Judah was overstated. He insists much that he had God on his side. It appears from the character of Abijah, 1 Kings 15. 3, that he was not himself truly religious, and yet he encouraged himself chiefly from the religion of his kingdom. It is common for those that deny the power of godliness, to boast of the form of it. Many that have little religion themselves, value it in others. But it was true that there were numbers of pious worshippers among them, and that theirs was the more righteous cause. And he insists as a token of God's presence, that his priests were with them sounding his trumpets, an assurance that in the day of battle they shall be remembered before the Lord, and saved from their enemies; for so this sacred signal is explained, Numb. 10. 9. Nothing is more effectual to imbolden men, than to be sure that God is with them. He concludes with fair warning to his enemies. Fight not against the God of your fathers. It is folly to fight against the God of almighty power, but it is treachery and base ingratitude to fight against your fathers' God; you cannot prosper. Thus many presume upon outward privileges and the covenant of God, who disregard his precepts; they boast of the form of godliness without the power of it; they are justly severe upon the crimes of others, yet do not amend their own, but excuse the offences of those with them, while they aggravate the offences of others.

We do not find that Jeroboam offered to make any answer; the strongest power, he thought, would determine the matter, not the better cause. Let us see the issue. Jeroboam, who trusted to his own strength, was beaten. Abijah and his people, who trusted in their God, came off conquerors, notwithstanding the disproportion of their strength and numbers. They were brought into a great strait, for the battle was before and behind. A good cause, and one which is designed to be victorious, may for a season be involved in embarrassment and distress. It was

David's case; They compassed me about like bees, Psa. 118. 10—12.

In their distress, when danger was on every side, which way should they look for deliverance unless upward? It is an unspeakable comfort, that no enemy can cut off our communication with Heaven; our way thither is always open. They cried unto the Lord. God brings his people into straits, that he may teach them to cry unto him. Earnest praying is crying. They relied on the God of their fathers, depended upon his power to help them, and committed themselves to him. The prayer of faith is the prevailing prayer, that by which we overcome the world, even our faith, 1 John 5. 4. The priests sounded the trumpets to animate them by giving the assurance of God's presence with them. It was a sacred sound, and put life into their faith. To the cry of prayer they added the shout of faith, and became more than conquerors.

Thus they obtained a complete victory. God smote Jeroboam's army with such terror and amazement, that they fled with precipitation. The consequence of this was, that the children of Israel were brought under. Many cities were taken, Bethel particularly. What became of the golden calf, we are not told. In Jehu's time we find it at Bethel, 2 Kings 10. 29. Perhaps Abijah suffered it to stand, for his heart was not perfect with God; and not improving what he had for the honour of God, he soon lost it all again. Jeroboam never looked up after this defeat, though he survived it two or three years. He escaped the sword of Abijah, but God struck him: there is no escaping his sword. Abijah waxed mighty; but soon after his triumphs, death conquered the conqueror. His ways and sayings were remarkable, so that they were recorded in a history written by the prophet Iddo, of whom we have no further account.

To triumph in contests which cause many thousands to expire in agony by the hands of their fellow-men, thus awfully sending their immortal souls to the tribunal of God, can give no pleasure to a feeling heart. Nor are victories obtained in the contests which rend the church of Christ, to the disgrace of the common cause, and the joy of the common enemy, to be more rejoiced in. But to conquer our own passions, to prevail against the tempter, to overcome the world, to subdue evil with good, are victories to be gained

by faith, patience, and prayer, in which we may safely rejoice.

2. Abijah's mother was called Maachah, the daughter of Absalom, ch. 11. 20; here she is called Michaiah, the daughter of Uriel. It is probable that she was a grand-daughter of Absalom, by his daughter Tamar, 2 Sam. 14. 27, and that her immediate father was this Uriel.—*Henry.*

(See 1 Kings 15.)

CHAPTER XIV.

Asa's piety—He strengthens his kingdom—Calling upon God, he overcomes the ethiopians.

Asa aimed at pleasing God, and studied to approve himself to him. Happy they that walk by this rule, to do that, not which is right in their own eyes, or in the eye of the world, but which is so in God's eyes. He saw God's eye always upon him, and that helped much to keep him to what is good and right. God graciously accepted of him in what he did, and approved it as good and right. He removed and abolished idolatry. He revived and established the pure worship of God. He commanded Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers, and not the gods of the heathen, and to do the law and the commandments, that is, to observe all Divine institutions, which many had utterly neglected. In doing this, the land was quiet for ten years. Abijah's victory, which was owing, under God, to his courage and bravery, laid a foundation for Asa's peace, which was the reward of his piety and reformation. Asa made prudent improvement of that tranquillity. If God give quietness, who then can make trouble? Job 34. 29. Those have rest indeed, to whom God gives rest, peace indeed, to whom Christ gives peace, not as the world giveth, John 14. 27. Asa notices that the rest they had was the gift of God. God must be acknowledged with thankfulness in the rest we are blessed with, of body and mind, family and country. As the frowns and rebukes of Providence should be observed to check us in an evil way, so the smiles of Providence should be noticed for our encouragement in that which is good: see Hag. 2. 18, 19; Mal. 3. 10. We find by experience that it is good to seek the Lord; it gives us rest; while we pursue the world, we meet with nothing but vexation. He consults with his people how to make a good use of the gleams of peace they enjoyed; and concludes with them that they must not be idle, nor secure.

A formidable army of ethiopians invaded Asa's kingdom. This fear came upon them, that their faith in God might be tried. That provision which we thought needless, may soon appear to be of great advantage. He that sought God in the day of his peace and prosperity, could, with holy boldness, cry to God in the day of his trouble, and call him his God. Asa's prayer is short, but it is the genuine language of faith and expectation from God. 1. He gives to God the glory of his infinite power and sovereignty. God works in his own strength, not in the strength of instruments. 2. He takes hold of their covenant relation to God as theirs; O Lord our God; and again, Thou art our God. 3. He pleads their dependence upon God, and the manner in which they looked to him, in this expedition. He was well prepared, yet trusted not to his preparations. 4. He interests God in their cause; Let not man (mortal man, so the word is) prevail against thee. The enemy is a mortal man; make it to appear what an unequal match he is for an immortal God. God gave Asa a glorious victory. When we go forth in God's name, we cannot but prosper. They cannot recover their strength whom the Lord smites, nor their courage to whom he sends terror, and all things work together for their good whom he favours. If we are the soldiers of Jesus Christ, we must be enriched by every conflict, and gainers by all our losses. The approaching victory over our last enemy, death, will make way for entrance into his presence, where is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.

(See 1 Kings 15.)

CHAPTER XV.

God's message to Asa—The people make a solemn covenant with God—They enjoy a long peace.

A prophet was sent to Asa and his army, when they returned victorious from the war with the ethiopians, to quicken them to their duty; that is the proper business of God's ministers, even with princes and the greatest of men. The Spirit of God came upon the prophet, both to instruct him what he should say, and to enable him to say it with clearness and boldness. He told them plainly upon what terms they stood with God. The Lord is with you, while you are with him. This is a word of comfort, that those who keep close to God shall always have his presence with

them, and also a word of caution. The continuance of it depends upon perseverance in the way of duty. He set before them the danger of forsaking God and his ordinances. It is not easy to determine what times or events were intended by the prophet. Some think it referred to the times of the judges. Others that the prophet pointed to the state of the kingdom of Israel. Others suppose the passage to be prophetic of the Babylonish captivity, and even of their present dispersion and future conversion, to which, doubtless, the words are applicable. Perhaps the prophet spake of God's general method of dealing with Israel in all ages, and thus his expressions describe several distinct transactions. The whole history of the church, and the experience of every believer, demonstrate that vexation and distress are never-failing consequences of negligence and sin, even to those who are not left to final apostasy; and that humiliation before God, and diligent seeking of him, always make way for peace and comfort.

The work of complete reformation had appeared so difficult, that Asa had not courage to attempt it, till assured of Divine assistance and acceptance. Assured expectation of these inspires the soul with courage and strength for present duty. Now, he extended his influence further than before. He summoned a solemn assembly, and brought to it the strangers who were come from the ten tribes. Their coming was a great encouragement to him; for the reason was, because they saw that the Lord his God was with him. He and his people offered sacrifices to God; thanksgiving for the favours they had received, and supplication for further favours. Prayers and praises are now our spiritual sacrifices.

The people voluntarily covenanted to seek the Lord, each for himself, with all earnestness. What is religion but seeking God, inquiring after him, applying to him upon all occasions? Also to execute the law of God upon idolaters, and those who disregarded his ordinances, Deut. 17. 2, &c. This covenant they entered into in the most cheerful and open manner. They were deeply impressed with the kindness they had experienced; they were very sincere, and much in earnest in their professed worship of the Lord. National piety procures national blessings. Whatever God gives should be employed ac-

cording to his will; especially we should devote our bodies and souls unto him, according to the tenour of his everlasting covenant, by accepting his salvation, and yielding ourselves to his service. We make nothing of our religion, if we do not make heart-work of it; God will have all the heart, or none. This devotedness to God our Saviour should be avowed and professed in the most solemn and public manner. Such obligations, indeed, lead to no more than was our duty before; but they have a tendency to excite us to every required service, and give those who join in them opportunity of exhorting one another to every good work. But unless we sincerely desire to serve God with our whole heart, such transactions will be mere hypocrisy. Those only experience the pleasure and comfort of religion, who are sincere and upright in it. What is done in hypocrisy is a mere drudgery. We are not called to punish others with death who are guilty of impiety or idolatry; yet those who neglect the great salvation of the gospel will not escape a more dreadful doom. Nothing must be indulged which interferes with our evident duty to God; but where the heart, in the main, is upright with God, there will be peace with him, though we come short of that perfection which is proposed to us, and to which we should continually be pressing forwards.

(See 1 Kings 15.)

CHAPTER XVI.

Asa seeks the aid of the Syrians—Is reproved by Hanani—His sickness and death.

Baasha seems to have meditated war against Judah from the beginning of his reign, but was not able to make any formidable attack till the year preceding his death. In this difficulty Asa gave up his confidence in God, and used very sinful means for deliverance. But though it answered his present purpose, it exposed him to severe rebukes; he never prospered afterwards. (See on 1 Kings 15.)

A plain and faithful reproof was given to Asa by a prophet of the Lord, for making a league with Syria. God is much displeased when he is distrusted, and an arm of flesh relied on more than his power and goodness. Herein he had done foolishly. It is foolish to lean on a broken reed, when we have the Rock of ages to rely upon. To convince Asa of his folly, the prophet shows that he, of all men, had no reason to distrust God, who had

found him such a powerful Helper, by whom he had been made to triumph over the ethiopians and the lubims. The many experiences we have had of the goodness of God to us, aggravate our distrust of him. But see how deceitful our hearts are! we trust in God, when we have nothing else to trust to, when need drives us to him: but when we have other things to stay on, we are apt to stay too much on them; yet, a believing confidence will be in God only, even when a smiling world courts it most.

He acted against knowledge of God and his providence. Asa could not be ignorant that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the earth, strongly to hold with them (so it may be read) whose heart is perfect toward him; that is, God governs the world in infinite wisdom, and the creatures, and all their actions, are continually under his eye. It reaches far, through the whole earth, no corner of which is from under it, not the most dark or distant. Does Satan walk to and fro in the earth? Providence runs to and fro, is never out of the way, never to seek, never at a loss. Also, God governs the world for the good of his people; does all in pursuance of the counsels of his love concerning their salvation. Christ is Head over all things to his church, Eph. 1. 22. They whose hearts are upright with him, may be sure of his protection. They that cannot find in their hearts to trust God, forfeit his protection, and throw themselves out of it.

Observe Asa's displeasure at this reproof. When once on the down-hill road, we hurry forward till we fall more and more into ungodliness. Is this Asa? Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall. A wise man! and yet in a rage! An israelite! and yet in a rage with a prophet! A good man! and yet impatient of reproof, and cannot bear to be told of his faults! What is man, when God leaves him to himself? They that idolize their own conduct, cannot bear contradiction; and they that indulge a peevish, passionate temper, will, some time or other, fly even in the face of God himself. He that abused his power for persecuting God's prophet, was left to himself, further to abuse it for crushing his own subjects. It is a lamentable proof, that there is no sin a believer is not capable of committing, if left to himself.

Two years before he died, Asa was

diseased in his feet. Making use of physicians, was his duty; but trusting to them, and expecting that from them, which was to be had from God only, were his sin and folly. The help of creatures must always be used with an eye to the Creator, and in dependence upon Him who makes every creature that to us which it is, and without whom the most skilful and faithful are physicians of no value. His funeral had something of extraordinary solemnity in it, an expression of the great respect his people retained for him, notwithstanding the failings and infirmities of his latter days. The eminent piety and usefulness of good men ought to be remembered to their praise, though they have had their blemishes. But, as the Lord was pleased to throw a cloud upon Asa's memory, we will not attempt to penetrate it, though we trust he did not die without repenting of his sins. In all conflicts and sufferings, we need especially to look to our own hearts, that they may be perfect towards God, in the exercise of faith, patience, and obedience.

1. The date, as it stands here, evidently is not correct. Usher reckons it to have been the thirty-sixth year of the kingdom of Asa, reckoning from the division of the kingdoms.

14. It was not customary with the jews to burn dead bodies; but at the decease of their kings they made fires with large quantities of spices and aromatic woods, in which they burned the bowels of the deceased, their clothes, and various other articles belonging to them.

CHAPTER XVII.

Jehoshaphat's piety—His earnestness in promoting religion in Judah—His prosperity.

In the characters of the kings, David's ways are often made the standard. But the distinction is no where so strongly marked, as here, between David's first ways and his last ways. Jehoshaphat followed David, as he followed God, and no further. St. Paul himself thus limits our imitation of him, 1 Cor. 11. 1. Follow me, as I follow Christ, and not otherwise. Many believers have had their first ways, which were their best ways; their first love, which was their strongest love. The greek version leaves out David's name, and so refers it to Asa. It is good to be cautious in following the best men, lest we step aside after them. When faith is vigorous, when zeal, love, and hope render the ways of God delightful, the soul rises superior to dangers and difficulties, and can even rejoice in sufferings for the Lord's sake. The condescen-

sion of God in employing and accepting us poor, guilty, polluted creatures, inspires us with renewed vigour in his service.

Jehoshaphat took away the teachers of lies. He sent forth teachers of truth. He found his people generally very ignorant, therefore endeavours to have them well taught. He ordered his princes, in the administration of justice, not only to correct the people when they did ill, but to teach them how to do better, and to give a reason for what they did, that the people might be informed of the difference between good and evil. The levites and priests went with the princes, and taught in Judah, having the book of the law. The public teaching of the word of God forms, in all ages, the great method of promoting the power of godliness. Thereby the understanding is informed, the conscience is awakened and directed.

Abundance of good may be done, when princes with their power, and priests and levites with their scriptural learning, agree to teach the people the good knowledge of God and their duty! These itinerant judges, and itinerant preachers together, were instrumental to diffuse a blessed light through the cities of Judah. They had the book of the law of the Lord with them. Ministers, when they go to teach, should have their bibles with them.

We have here a particular account of Jehoshaphat's prosperity, and the flourishing state of his kingdom. God's good providence so ordered it, that, while the princes and priests were instructing and reforming the country, none of his neighbours gave him any molestation, to take him off from that good work. Many of them brought presents to secure his friendship. Perhaps it was tribute imposed by Asa, who made himself master of the cities of the philistines, and the tents of the arabians, ch. 14. 14, 15. He had very considerable stores in the cities of Judah. He was a man of business, and aimed at the public good in all his undertakings, either to preserve the peace, or prepare for war. The armies, we may suppose, were dispersed over the country, but mustered and trained, and ready whenever there was occasion. But it was not this formidable army that struck terror upon the neighbouring nations, that restrained them from attempting any thing against Israel, or obliged them to pay tribute; but the fear of God which fell upon them when Jehoshaphat

reformed his country, and set up a preaching ministry in it. The ordinances of God are more the strength and safety of a kingdom, than military force; its men of God, more than men of war.

The sacred history requires us to notice the hand of God in every event. This is but little regarded. Is not Jehovah nearly excluded by us from the government of his own world? He is not sought to for success, and the praise of it is not given to him. But let not sinners presume upon their abilities, or suppose that their schemes will certainly prosper, notwithstanding their contempt of religion. The God of heaven, who is set at nought, may instantly defeat the best concerted plans, and turn them to confusion. Nor is regard to religion inimical to the temporal interests of nations, or contrary to sound politics. Zeal for truth and righteousness among governors produces most beneficial effects. All lively, exemplary christians are blessings, so far as their influence extends. Let all employ the talents they have: be faithful, even in that which is little. Set up the worship of God in your houses. The charge of a family is important. Why should you not instruct them as Jehoshaphat did his subjects, in the book of the law of the Lord. But be consistent. Do not recommend one thing and practise another. Begin with yourselves. Seek to the Lord God of Israel, then call upon your children and servants to follow your example.—(60.)

CHAPTER XVIII.

Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab—Their expedition for the recovery of Ramoth-gilead.

This history we read in 1 Kings 22. Abundant riches and honour give large opportunities of doing good, but they are attended with snares and temptations which few entirely escape. Men are not much acquainted with the artifices of Satan and the deceitfulness of their own hearts, when they covet riches with the idea to do good with them. Among other evils, riches often betray pious persons into improper marriages for themselves and their children. We should indeed follow peace with all men, but ought to have no intimacy with the workers of iniquity.

This marriage of his son drew Jehoshaphat into intimate familiarity with Ahab, and a league against the syrians.

From the result we may see, 1. The great duty of acknowledging God in all our ways, and of inquiring at his word, whatever we undertake. 2. The great danger of bad company, even to good men. 3. The unhappiness of those who are surrounded with flatterers, especially flattering prophets, who cry peace to them, and prophesy nothing but smooth things: that counsel is not always best for us, which is most pleasing to us. 4. The power of Satan, by the Divine permission, in the children of disobedience. 5. The justice of God in giving those up to strong delusions to believe a lie, who will not receive the love of the truth, but rebel against it. 6. The hard case of faithful ministers, who often have been hated, and persecuted, and ill treated, for being true to their God, and just and kind to the souls of their fellow-men.

What can hurt those whom God will protect? What can shelter those whom God will destroy? Jehoshaphat is safe in his robes, Ahab killed in his armour; for the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. We should be cautious of involving ourselves in the worldly undertakings of evil men; and still more we should avoid engaging in their sinful projects. But God can and will extricate his faithful people from the difficulties and dangers into which they have sinfully run themselves, when they call upon him. He hath all hearts in his hand, so that he easily rescues them. Blessed is the man that putteth his trust in the Lord!

(See remarks on 1 Kings 22.)

CHAPTER XIX.

Jehoshaphat visits his kingdom--His instructions to the judges.

God showed great favour to Jehoshaphat, in bringing him back in safety from his dangerous expedition with Ahab. Whenever we return in peace to our houses, we ought to acknowledge God's providence in preserving our going out and our coming in. But if we have been kept through more than ordinary dangers, we are, in a special manner, bound to be thankful. There was but a step, perhaps, between us and death, and yet we are alive. He fared better than he deserved; he was out of the way of his duty. Distinguishing mercies lay under peculiarly strong obligations. God sent him a reproof for his affinity with Ahab.

It is a great mercy to be made sensible of our faults, that we may repent, and amend the error, before it be too late. The prophet tells him that he had done very ill in joining with Ahab; Shouldest thou love them that hate the Lord? It is the character of wicked people, that they are haters of God, Rom. 1. 30. Jehoshaphat took the reproof well. Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness. See the effect the reproof had upon him. He made a visitation of his own kingdom. By what the prophet said, he perceived that his former attempts for reformation were well-pleasing to God; therefore he revived them, and did what was then left undone. It is good when commendations quicken us to our duty.

Jehoshaphat erected courts of justice in the several cities of the kingdom. The judges of these courts were to keep the people in the worship of God, to punish violations of the law, and decide controversies. The means he prescribes to them for keeping close to their duty are two. 1. Great caution and circumspection. 2. Great piety and religion. The motives to engage to faithfulness are three, all taken from God. 1. That from him they had their commission. 2. That his eye was upon them. 3. That he is the great Example of justice to magistrates. The tendency of human nature to evil, renders unremitting vigour necessary to all who would suppress abuses and effect reformation. All legal decisions should be with little expense, that the poor may be placed at equal advantage with the rich, in obtaining their due.

Jehoshaphat erected a supreme court at Jerusalem, which was advised with, and appealed to in all difficult cases that occurred. The two chiefs, or presidents, were Amariah, the high priest in ecclesiastical causes, Zebadiah, the prime minister of the state in all civil causes. Thus there are diversities of gifts and operations, but all from the same Spirit, and for the good of the body; and as every one has received the gift, so let him minister the same. Blessed be God, both for magistrates and ministers, scribes and statesmen, men of books, and men of business. Observe the charge the king gave. They must do all in the fear of the Lord, with a perfect, upright heart. They must make it their great and constant care to prevent sin, not only as hurtful to themselves and the public

peace, but as an offence to God, and that which would bring wrath upon the people. This do, and ye shall not trespass. This implies that those who have power in their hands, contract the guilt of sin themselves, if they do not use their power for preventing and restraining sin in others. They must act with resolution. Deal courageously, fear not the face of man, be bold in the discharge of your duty; whoever is against you, God will protect you.

CHAPTER XX.

Ver. 1—13. *The danger and distress of Judah—Jehoshaphat's prayer.*

Here is Jehoshaphat in distress, followed however by such a glorious deliverance as was abundant recompence for his piety. If we meet with trouble in the way of duty, we may believe it is that God may show us the more of his marvellous loving-kindness. The moabites and ammonites, and their auxiliaries, came from beyond the Dead sea. Several nations joined in this confederacy, but especially the children of Lot, whom the rest helped, Psa. 83. 6—8. Jehoshaphat feared; consciousness of guilt made him fear. Holy fear is a spur to prayer and preparation, Heb. 11. 7. He set himself to seek the Lord. They that would find favour with him, must set themselves to seek him, must do it with fixedness of thought, with sincerity of intention, and with vigour and resolution.

In all calamities and dangers, public or personal, our first business should be to seek help from God. Hence the advantage of days for national fasting and prayer. Such seasons remind believers to unite as with one heart and voice. Even the cries of natural men for outward mercies are an acknowledgment of dependence on God. It is therefore commendable in princes to call people to such observances, but still more so when their own example proves they are in earnest.

The people assembled in the court of the temple, to join in prayer; they and their families were in danger, therefore they bring them with them to seek the Lord. Let all remember to bring their children, and the rest of their families, as soon as possible, to the ordinances of God, that they may be trained up in his house, and become in reality, as well as professedly, a part of his family. From the first to the last of our seeking the

Lord, we must approach him with humiliation for our sins, justifying him in all we suffer or fear, and trusting only in his mercy and power. This prayer of Jehoshaphat is an excellent prayer. 1. He acknowledges the sovereign dominion of the Divine Providence; he gives to God the glory of it, and takes to himself the comfort of it. Lord, exert it on our behalf. Glorify thy omnipotence. 2. He lays hold on their covenant relation to God, and interest in him. Whom should we seek to, whom should we trust to for relief, but the God we have chosen and served. 3. He shows the title they had to this good land they possessed. The seed of Abraham thy friend. They that use what they have for God, may comfortably hope he will secure it to them. Every true believer is a son of Abraham, a friend of God; with them the everlasting covenant is established, to them every promise belongs. They are assured of God's love by his dwelling in human nature in the person of the Saviour. 4. He makes mention of the temple they had built, not as if that merited any thing at God's hand, but it was a token of God's favourable presence with them. 5. He pleads the ingratitude and injustice of his enemies. Thou wouldest not let Israel invade them, nor give them any disturbance, Deut. 2. 5, 19, yet now they invade us. We may comfortably appeal to God against those that render us evil for good. The justice of God is the refuge of those who are wronged. 6. Jehoshaphat professes entire dependence upon God for deliverance. Though he had a great army, he said, We have no might without thee, none that we can expect any thing from, without thy special presence and blessing; we rely upon thee, and from thee is all our expectation. The Lord will no more forsake those who know not what to do, but look to him for help, than a mother will desert her infant that clings to her bosom, and knows no other refuge.

Ver. 14—19. *Jahaziel's prophecy of victory.*

The spirit of prophecy came upon a levite that was present, not in any place of eminence, but in the midst of the congregation. The Spirit, like the wind, blows where, and on whom He listeth. He encouraged them to trust in God, though the danger was very threatening. He gives them intelligence of the enemy, and orders them to march toward them. He

assures them, they should be joyful spectators of the defeat of the enemy. God is with you, who is able to do his work himself, and will do it. Let the christian soldier go out against his spiritual enemies, and the God of peace will make him more than a conqueror. Jehoshaphat and his people received these assurances with faith, reverence, and thankfulness. Thus the Lord will speak peace to those who seek him. When his word banishes our fears, and calms our spirits, our prayers are in a great measure answered. If God have pardoned our sins, he is for us; and if God be for us, who can be against us? We need not be dismayed at the number and power of our enemies, or on account of our own weakness. Our trials will prove our gain. The advantage will be all our own, but the whole glory must be ascribed to God.

16. Ziz probably was Ziza in Arabia Petraea, Jeruel a part of the wilderness of Tekoa.

Ver. 20—30. *The ammonites and moabites destroyed—The thanksgiving of Judah,*

Jehoshaphat exhorted his troops to firm faith in God, entire reliance on his power and faithfulness, and a confident expectation that the words spoken to them should be accomplished. He bids them believe in the Lord God, and give credit to his word; then they should prosper and be established. Faith inspires a man with true courage; nor will any thing contribute more to the establishing of the heart in shaking times, than a firm belief of the power, and mercy, and promise of God. In our spiritual conflicts this is the victory, even our faith.

It was resolved to appoint singers to go out before the army, to praise God with that ancient and good doxology which eternity itself will not wear out, "Praise the Lord, for his mercy endureth for ever." By this advance toward the field of battle, Jehoshaphat expressed his firm reliance upon the word of God; praise pleases God better than all burnt-offering and sacrifice. In all our confidence in the Lord, and our praises of him, let us especially regard his everlasting mercy to sinners through Jesus Christ, as completing the beauty of his manifested holiness.

Never was an army so destroyed as that of the enemy. They fell upon their own friends as if they had been enemies, and helped to destroy one another, so that none escaped. This God did when

his people began to sing and to praise, for he delights to furnish those with matter for praise, who have hearts for it. We read of his being angry at the prayers of his people, Psa. 80. 4, but never at their praises. What ground there was for their jealousies does not appear, perhaps there was none; but they fell out, and cut one another off. Thus God often makes wicked people instruments of destruction to one another. Jehoshaphat and his people prayed to be delivered from being spoiled by the enemy; God not only did that, but enriched them with the spoil of the enemy. And never was a victory celebrated with more solemn and enlarged thanksgivings. That day's work gave a name to the place, the valley of Berachah, that is, of blessing. Every day we must bless God; as long as we live, and while we have any being, we must praise him, spending our time in that work in which we hope to spend our eternity. Public mercies call for public acknowledgments, in the courts of the Lord's house, Psa. 116. 19. Jehoshaphat's kingdom was hereby made very considerable. It begat in the neighbours a reverence of God, and a cautious fear of doing any injury to his people. The whole forms a remarkable and instructive history. No undertaking recorded in the word of God was entered upon, conducted, and concluded in so proper a manner.

22. Or, "Jehovah turned the ambush-men of mount Seir, who should have come against Judah, against the children of Ammon and Moab, and they were smitten."—*Boothroyd.*

Ver. 31—37. *Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahaziah—His ships wrecked.*

Jehoshaphat did right, kept close to the worship of God, and did what he could to keep his people close to it. But the people still retained a partiality for the high-places. Those in which the true God was worshipped were thought allowable. Except men's hearts seek the Lord, magistrates and ministers can do nothing effectual. The best of men seldom shine so bright in prosperity as in adversity. Even Jehoshaphat still retained a partiality for the house of Ahab. He knew that Ahaziah did wickedly, and therefore could not expect to prosper; yet he joined with him in trade, became his partner in a fleet for Ophir. After this, after God had done such great things for him, given him not only victory, but wealth; after this, to go and join himself with a wicked king, was very ungrateful.

What could he expect but that God should be angry with him? Ezra 9. 13, 14. Yet the Lord sends to show him his error, and bring him to repentance, by a prophet, who foretold the blasting of his project, and by a storm, which brake the ships in the port. It seems, he took the warning; when Ahaziah afterward pressed him to join him, he would not, 1 Kings 22. 49.

Thus the alliance was broken, and the Divine rebuke had its effect at least for a season. If we have departed from God, and are recovered even by the severest correction, let us be thankful for any losses which may have prevented the loss of our immortal souls. Let us praise the Lord, who sought after us, and left us not to perish in our sins.—(60.)

36. Connecting this passage with 1 Kings 22. 48, 49, we have the complete account of this transaction. Jehoshaphat prepared a fleet to sail to Ophir in partnership with Ahaziah. As the ships were passing out of the port of Eziongeber, a storm which God sent to punish this confederacy drove them upon the rocks, and they were lost. The station of the king's ships was thereupon removed to Elath, from whence Jehoshaphat sent out another fleet, in which he would not permit Ahaziah to have any concern. Elath was lost in the revolt of the edomites in the reign of Jehoram, recovered by Uzziah, and finally lost by Ahaz.—*Prideaux.*

(See 1 Kings 22. 48, 49.—Read 2 Kings 3.)

CHAPTER XXI.

Ver. 1—11. *The wicked reign of Jehoram.*

Jehoshaphat had many sons, and it is said, ver. 13, that the others were better than Jehoram; but Jehoshaphat, having no command from God, did not set him aside. As soon as Jehoram was settled in the throne, he slew all his brethren. Those that mean ill themselves are commonly, without cause, jealous of those about them. Jehoram hated his brethren, and slew them, for the same reason that Cain hated Abel, and slew him—because their piety condemned his impiety. With them he slew divers of the princes who adhered to them. Woe unto him that thus foundeth a kingdom in blood, Hab. 2. 12; it will prove a foundation that will sink the superstructure. In the mystery of Providence such men sometimes prosper for a time, and murder others much wiser and better than themselves; but the Lord hath righteous purposes in permitting such events, part of which may now be discerned, and the rest will be visible in the light of the eternal world.

They are connected in the great chain of causes and effects, and are made instrumental in carrying on the purposes of God.

Jehoram was a most wicked king; he corrupted his kingdom; he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did his utmost to set up idolatry again. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were induced, by his persuasions, to fall in with his idolatry; but the other parts of Judah were compelled to it by persecution. Idolatrous worship was accompanied by sinful rites. When he forsook God and his worship, his subjects withdrew from their allegiance to him. The edomites revolted, and he could not reduce them. One of the cities of his own kingdom, Libnah, revolted, and set up for a free state. They shook off his government, because he became an idolater and a worshipper of false gods. They could not continue subject to him, without danger of being drawn away from God and their duty. God was tender of his covenant with the house of David, and therefore would not destroy the royal family, though so corrupt and degenerate. Ver. 12—20. *Elijah's letter to Jehoram—His miserable end.*

A warning from God was sent to Jehoram by a writing from Elijah the prophet. The Spirit of prophecy might direct Elijah to prepare this writing before his translation, in the foresight of Jehoram's crimes, and it might be left to Elisha to transmit it to him. The message is sent him in the name of the Lord God of David his father; that which was his honour, was an aggravation of his degeneracy. He is plainly told that his sin should certainly ruin his kingdom and family, and his health and life. It does not appear that he took any notice of it. They that will not believe shall feel. But no marvel that hardened sinners are not frightened from sin, and to repentance, by the threatenings of misery in another world, which is future and out of sight, when the certainty of misery in this world, the sinking of their estates, and the ruin of their health, will not restrain them from vicious courses.

See Jehoram here stripped of all his comforts. God stirred up his neighbours against him, who had loved and feared Jehoshaphat, but hated and despised him. They invaded his country, but no mention is made of their carrying any away captive, but the king's wives and his sons. Thus God made it evident the

controversy was with him and his house. He had slain all his brethren to strengthen himself; now, all his sons are slain but one. When Jeroboam's house, and Baasha's, and Ahab's were destroyed, there was none left; but David's house must not be wholly extirpated, though sometimes wretchedly degenerated, because a blessing was in it; no less a blessing than that of the Messiah.

See Jehoram tormented with sore diseases and of long continuance; such as were threatened in the law against those that would not fear the Lord their God, Deut. 28. 58, 59. Good men may be afflicted with diseases; but to them they are fatherly chastisements, and by the support of Divine consolations the soul may dwell at ease even when the body lies in pain. These sore diseases seized Jehoram just after his house was plundered, and his wives and children carried away, which added, no doubt, very much to his grief in his sickness. To be sick and poor, sick and solitary, but especially to be sick and in sin, sick and under the curse of God, sick and destitute of grace to bear it with, no inward comfort to balance it with, is a most deplorable case. He reigned but eight years. Nobody valued him while he lived, none lamented him when he died. The excluding his body from the sepulchres of his fathers might intimate the everlasting separation of the souls of the wicked, after death, from the spirits of just men. His memory was far from being precious, therefore his subjects did not honour it. The generality of the people, though prone to idolatry, had no true kindness for their idolatrous kings. Wickedness and profaneness make men despicable, even in the eyes of those who have but little religion, while natural conscience often gives honour to the truly pious. They that despise God shall be lightly esteemed, as Jehoram was. May the Lord enable us so to live that we may have hope and comfort in the approach and agonies of death, and a joyful entrance into glory, that our survivors may have to bless God for benefit received from us, and to regret their loss of us.

To understand the chronology of the reign of Jehoram of Judah, it is necessary to observe that three several dates are assigned to the beginning of it. The first in the seventeenth year of his father, when he was made viceroy, when his father went to fight for the recovery of Ramoth-gilead; the second, five years after, when his father was in Moab with Jehoram of Israel; the

third time on his father's death. If he had destroyed his brothers and attempted to restore idolatry, on his first or second accession to the throne, the letter might have been written by Elijah immediately before he was taken up into heaven; but it is not likely he could have acted thus during the lifetime of his father. If this letter was written by Elijah to Jehoram before the murder of his brothers, it may be regarded as the commencement of that part of the dispensations of Providence which was continued nearly to the close of the canon of scripture; that is, it was the first written prophecy of which we read, that confined itself to the judgments about to be inflicted on an individual. It was a new mode of appeal to the princes and people of Judah and Israel. It was made at a time when the public corruption was at its height; it was confirmed by miracles, and authenticated by the witnesses among whom it was deposited, who probably were the sons of the prophets.—*Townsend*. Or, according to *Boothroyd*, the letter was from Elisha; but this is only supported by conjecture.

(See 2 Kings 8.)

CHAPTER XXII.

*The wicked reign of Ahaziah in Judah—
Athaliah destroys the royal family.*

The history of Ahaziah's reign is briefly summed up. His mother and her relations were his counsellors to do wickedly, and it was to his destruction. He was not influenced by the favours either of God or man, but walked in the way of the house of Ahab, did evil in the sight of the Lord like them. He was counselled by his mother and her relations to do so. The counsel of the ungodly ruins many young persons when they are setting out in the world. This young prince gave himself up to be led by them, and did just as they would have him. Thus they debase and destroy themselves that forsake the Divine guidance. Ahaziah was counselled by them to his destruction. So it proved. Those who counsel us to do wickedly, counsel us to our destruction; while they pretend friendship, they are our worst enemies. They involved him in the common ruin of the house of Ahab. See and dread the mischief of bad company, and of joining with sinners. If not the infection, yet let the destruction be feared, Rev. 18. 4. See and acknowledge the justice of God. His providence brought Ahaziah, just at this fatal juncture, to see Joram.

We have here, 1. A wicked woman endeavouring to destroy the house of David, that she might set up a throne for herself. 2. A good woman preserving it from being wholly extirpated. One of the late king's sons saved alive, that a lamp might be ordained for God's anointed, for

no word of God shall fall to the ground. And the most desperate and prosperous workers of iniquity who are hardened against every natural affection as well as the fear of God, can only prevail to execute his righteous purposes.

How worthy of wonder are thy just and merciful dispensations, O God, in that thou sufferest the seed of good Jehoshaphat to be destroyed by her hand in whose affinity he offended, and yet savest one branch of the stock of Jehoshaphat for the sake of so faithful a progenitor!—(34.)

Nothing but the miraculous intervention of the Divine Providence could have saved the line of David at this time, and preserved the prophecy relative to the Messiah. The whole truth of that prophecy, and the salvation of the world, appeared to be now suspended on the brittle thread of the life of an infant of a year old, see ch. 24. 1, to destroy whom was the interest of the reigning power! But God can save by few as well as by many. He had purposed, and vain were the counter-exertions of earth and hell.—(11.)

1, 2. Ahaziah is Jehoahaz, ch. 21. 17; it is the same name, only the letters are transposed. Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, 2 Kings 8. 26, and his father was only forty when he died. The error, probably, is that of the transcriber. The greek, syriac, and arabic versions read twenty-two.

9. The words translated, "brought him to Jehu," may be rendered, "they caused him to be seen by Jehu," the difficulty which arises on comparing this passage with 2 Kings 9. 27, 28, thereby is cleared. The order of events attending the death of Ahaziah, from comparing these two passages, appear to be as follows:—Ahaziah, after the death of Joram, escaped to Samaria. Jehu proceeded thither, after destroying the kindred of Ahab and Ahaziah. On arriving at Samaria, he caused search to be made for Ahaziah, who again attempted to escape. In so doing Jehu saw him, and gave the order, "Smite him in the chariot." Jehu's soldiers pursued Ahaziah, and smote him at the going up to Gur. After he was mortally wounded, his charioteer escaped with him to Megiddo, where he died.—*From Lightfoot.*

(See 2 Kings 8. 9. 11.)

CHAPTER XXIII.

Joash crowned and Athaliah slain.

We may suppose the bad posture of affairs in Jerusalem during Athaliah's usurpation. But after such a dark and tedious night, the returning day in this revolution was the brighter and the more welcome. Jehoiada ventured his life, but it was in a good cause, therefore he went on boldly. It is here said that his sons joined with him in anointing the young

king, one of whom, Zechariah, Joash afterward put to death for reproving him, ch. 24. 20—22, which was so much the more ungrateful. Here is, 1. The people pleased. They ran with joy to see this sight, praised the king, and praised God, for they had with them such as taught to sing praise. 2. Athaliah slain. Nobody seconded her, or sided with her; the pride of her heart deceived her. 3. The original contract agreed to. In the Kings it was said, Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord, the people, and the king, 2 Kings 11. 17. Here it is said to be between himself, the people, and the king; for he, as God's priest, was God's representative in this transaction. The true intent of the whole was, that they should be the Lord's people. God covenanted by Jehoiada to take them for his people; the king and people covenanted with Him to be his; and then the king covenanted with the people to govern them as the people of God; and the people with the king to be subject to him, as the Lord's people, in his fear and for his sake. To look upon ourselves and one another as the Lord's people, should powerfully influence us in the discharge of all our duty both to God and man. 4. Baal destroyed. They would not have done their work, if they had destroyed the usurper of the king's right only, and not the usurper of God's right. The greatest grievance of Athaliah's reign was the bringing in the worship of Baal, and supporting that; therefore that must be abolished in the first place. 5. The temple service revived. This had been neglected in the last reigns. But Jehoiada put the offices of the house of the Lord into the proper course and proper hands again, according to the law of Moses, and the appointment of David. The sacrifices were offered with rejoicing and singing; and well they might be; we joy in God when we receive the atonement, Rom. 5. 11. 6. The civil government re-established. They brought the king in state to his own palace, and set him upon the throne of the kingdom to give law, and give judgment, either in his own person, or by Jehoiada his tutor. Thus was this happy revolution perfected; the generality of the people rejoiced in it, the rest were quiet, and made no opposition. When the Son of David is enthroned in the soul, all is quiet, and springs of joy are opened.

14. The ranges mean the walls or buildings round the temple.

(See 2 Kings 11.)

CHAPTER XXIV.

Ver. 1—14. *The early part of the reign of Joash in Judah—The temple repaired.*

This account of Joash's good beginning is also given 2 Kings 12. It is happy for young people, setting out in the world, to be under the direction of the wise and good, as Joash was under the influence of Jehoiada, during whose time he did that which was right. It is especially prudent for young people to take advice in their marriages, as Joash did. That is a turn of life which should be attended to with great care. Men may go far in external performances of religion, and keep long to them, merely by the power of education, and the influence of friends, though they are not actuated by a living principle of grace in their hearts. And in the shows of devotion, it is possible that those who have only the form of godliness may outstrip those who have the power of it. Joash is more solicitous and more zealous about the repair of the temple than Jehoiada himself. It is easier to *build* temples, than to *be* temples to God. But the repairing of places for public worship is a good work, which all in their places should promote, for the decency and conveniency of religious assemblies.

Many a good work would be done that now lies undone, if active men put it forward. When Joash found that money did not come in as he expected one way, he tried another, and that answered the intention, ver. 10. Wisdom herein is profitable to direct. Faithfulness is the greatest praise, and will be the greatest comfort of those intrusted with public treasure, or employed in public business. The king and Jehoiada faithfully paid the money to the workmen, who faithfully did the work.

Ver. 15—27. *Jehoiada's death—Joash falls into idolatry—He is slain by his servants.*

We have here the apostasy of Joash after his good counsellor was removed by death. It was a mercy that Jehoiada lived so long, one hundred and thirty years; by which it appears that he was born in Solomon's time, and had lived six reigns before this. After his death, both king and kingdom miserably degenerated. See what a great judgment on any prince or people the death of godly, zealous, useful men is. See how necessary it is that

we act in religion from an inward principle. Then the loss of a parent, a minister, or a friend will not be losing our religion.

Bad counsellors made obeisance to Joash, congratulated him upon the death of his old tutor, as his release from the discipline he had been so long under. And he hearkened to them. Both princes and inferior people have been many a time flattered into their ruin. The king and princes, who, a while before, were repairing the temple, now forsook the temple: those who had pulled down groves and idols, now themselves served them. So inconstant is man, and so little confidence is there to be put in him. True grace alone will enable a man to bring forth fruit unto the end.

God sent prophets to them to reprove their wickedness, and to tell what would be in the end thereof. It is the work of ministers to bring people, not to themselves, but to God; to bring those again to him who have gone from him. In the most degenerate times, God left not himself without witness. They slighted all the prophets; no reproofs, warnings, threatenings, nor any methods the prophets took could reclaim them. They slew one of them. The people were assembled in the court of the temple, when Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, being filled with the spirit of prophecy, stood up, and without provoking language, told the people of their sin, and the consequences. He reminded them what was written in the law; the precept they broke, the penalty they incurred. This is the work of ministers, by the word of God, as a lamp and a light, to discover the sin of men, and expound the providences of God.

By the conspiracy of the princes, and by the commandment of the king, they stoned Zechariah to death immediately, in the court of the house of the Lord. So daringly do they defy God himself, that nothing less than the blood of the prophet can satisfy them. It is almost impossible that any murder could contain more aggravated injustice, impiety, and ingratitude; the latter is particularly noticed. Observe the dying martyr's prophetic words; The Lord look upon it, and require it! This came not from a spirit of revenge, but a spirit of prophecy. This precious blood was reckoned for quickly in the judgments upon this apostate prince; it came into the account afterward in the destruction of Jerusalem by the

chaldeans. Their misusing of the prophets brought upon them ruin without remedy, ch. 36. 16; nay, some think that our Saviour makes the persecutors of him and his gospel answerable for the blood of this Zechariah; so loud, so long does the blood of the martyrs cry: Matt. 23. 35.

The judgments of God came upon Joash for his aggravated wickedness; a small army of syrians made themselves masters of Jerusalem. God's people had often been conquerors, when the enemy had the advantage of the greater number; but now an inconsiderable handful of syrians routed a great host of israelites, because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers. The syrians were employed as instruments in God's hand to execute judgments against Joash, though they little thought so, Isa. 10. 6, 7; and see Deut. 32. 30.

God smote Joash with great diseases, of body, or mind, or both, before the syrians departed from him. If vengeance pursue men, the end of one trouble will be but the beginning of another. His own servants conspired against him. They slew him in his bed, for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada; by which it should seem that he did not only slay Zechariah, but others of the sons of Jehoiada. The regicides are named, and it is observable that their mothers were foreigners. The idolatrous kings countenanced marriages which the law prohibited, and they led to their own destruction. His people would not bury him in the sepulchres of the kings, because of his mal-administration. These judgments are called the burdens laid upon him, for the wrath of God is a heavy burden, too heavy for any man to bear. Or it may be meant of the threatenings denounced against him by the prophets, for those are called burdens. Usually God sets some special marks of his displeasure upon apostates in this life, for warning to all: How dreadful is it when a painful and miserable death transmits the impenitent rebel to a miserable eternity! May God help us to be in earnest to take warning, to be upright in heart, and to persevere to the end; and may he grant that we may die the death of the righteous, and that our latter end may be like his.

21. The jews say, There were seven transgressions in this; for they killed a priest, a prophet, a judge, they shed innocent blood, polluted the court of the temple, the sabbath, and the day of expiation; for on that day, their tradition says, this happened.—*Henry.*

CHAPTER XXV.

Ver. 1—13. *Amaziah king of Judah obeys the commands of God—He conquers the edomites.*

Amaziah worshipped the true God, and countenanced religion, but not with a perfect heart. He was no enemy to it, but a cool and indifferent friend. Such is the character of too many; they do that which is good, but not with the heart, not with a perfect heart. He put to death the traitors that murdered his father. Though they intended to avenge on the king the death of the prophet, ch. 24. 25, yet that by no means justified their wickedness; for they were not the avengers, but presumptuously took God's work out of his hands. Therefore Amaziah did what became him, in calling them to account for it; but he kept within the rule of that law which forbade the putting of the children to death for the parents' sin.

The edomites some time before had revolted from under the dominion of Judah. Amaziah made preparation for his expedition against them. He found in Judah and Benjamin 300,000 men fit for war; in Jehoshaphat's time, fifty or sixty years before, they were four times as many: sin weakens a people. He took into his pay 100,000 israelites. If he had advised with his prophets, or had considered how little his ancestors got by alliances with Israel, he would not have had this to undo. But rashness makes work for repentance. What good could be expected from those who had not God with them, nor his blessing upon their undertakings? It is comfortable to employ those who, we have reason to hope, have an interest in heaven; and dangerous to associate with those from whom the Lord is departed. The prophet assured him that if he persisted in his resolution to take these idolatrous, apostate israelites with him, it was at his peril. God has power to help thee without them, and to cast thee down, though thou hast them with thee.

Amaziah's obedience to the command of God is to his honour. He would rather lose his money, disoblige his allies, and dismiss a fourth part of his army, than offend God. A firm belief of God's all-sufficiency to bear us out in our duty, and to make up all the loss and damage we sustain in his service, will make his yoke very easy, and his burden very light. What is it to trust in God, but to be willing to venture the loss of any thing for him, in confidence

that we shall not lose by him, but that it shall be made up to us in kind or kindness? When we grudge to part with any thing for God and our religion, this should satisfy us, that God is able to give us much more than this. He triumphed over the edomites. What provocation he had to be severe toward them we are not told. The disbanded soldiers of Israel plundered several cities that lay upon the borders. But why should God suffer this to be done? Was it not in obedience to him that they were sent home, and yet shall the country thus suffer by it? Doubtless, God intended hereby to chastise those cities of Judah for idolatries, which were found most in those parts that lay next to Israel. The men of Israel had corrupted them, and now they were made a plague to them. Satan both tempts and torments.

Convinced sinners, who have not true faith, always object to self-denying obedience. Like Amaziah, they say, But what shall we do for the hundred talents? What shall we do if by hallowing the sabbath we lose so many good customers? What shall we do without this gain? What shall we do if we lose the friendship of the world? We are almost persuaded that the way you point out to us is the road to heaven, but what shall we do about the expenses of our journey? Many endeavour to quiet their consciences by the pretence that such practices are necessary; that they may be Christ's disciples without taking up their cross and forsaking all for him. The answer is, as here, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this. He has promised to make up even in this world, for all that has been renounced for his sake and the gospel's. Yet a single instance of self-denying obedience does not always prove that a man has true faith. The deliberate, daily renouncing of the world, denying ourselves, bearing our cross, and opposing our sinful inclinations in obedience to the Saviour, forms the constant evidence of an interest in his precious promises: to some measure of this temper and conduct every true believer hath attained.

Ver. 14—16. *Amaziah worships the idols of Edom—His impatience of reproof.*

Amaziah revolted from the God of Israel to the gods of the edomites. To worship the gods of those whom he had conquered, who could not protect their own worshippers, was the greatest absur-

dity. If men would consider the inability of all those things to help them, to which they have recourse when they forsake God, they would not be such enemies to themselves. The reproof God sent by a prophet was too just to be answered; but he silenced him, bade him say not a word more to him. Men would gladly have their prophets speak when and what they desire, and not otherwise. He threatened him. He seems to remind him of Zechariah's fate in the last reign. The prophet forbore. He is joined to idols; let him alone, Hos. 4. 17. Miserable is the condition of that man with whom the blessed Spirit, by ministers and conscience, forbears to strive, Gen. 6. 3. And both the reprovers, that in the gate, and that in the bosom, if long baffled, will, at length, forbear. The secure sinner rejoices to have silenced his reprovers and monitors; but what comes of it? They that are deaf to reproof, are ripening apace for destruction, Prov. 29. 1.

Ver. 17—28. *Amaziah's rash challenge to the king of Israel—He is slain by his subjects.*

Never was a proud prince more thoroughly mortified than Amaziah was by Joash king of Israel. This history verifies two of Solomon's proverbs, That a man's pride will bring him low, Prov. 29. 23; it goes before his destruction, not only deservedly procures it, but often is the immediate occasion. He that exalteth himself shall be abased. He that goes forth hastily to strive, will, probably, not know what to do in the end thereof, when his neighbour has put him to shame, Prov. 25. 8.

And what are we when we offer to establish our own righteousness, or presume to justify ourselves before the Most High God, but despicable thistles, that fancy themselves stately cedars? And are not various temptations, is not every corruption, a wild beast of the desert, which will trample on the impotent boaster, and tread his haughty pretensions in the dust?—(31.)

There are two passages here which we had not in the Kings. 1. That Amaziah took advice before he challenged the king of Israel. But of whom? Not of the prophet, but of his statesmen that would flatter him. It is good to take advice, but then it must be of those that are fit to advise us. Those that will not take advice from the word of God, which would guide them aright, will justly be left to the bad advice of those that counsel them to their destruction. 2. Amaziah's imprudence

was made the punishment of his impiety. It was of the Lord. God left him to act thus foolishly, that he and his people might be delivered into the hands of their enemies, because they had forsaken God, and sought after the gods of Edom. They that will not be persuaded to do well for their souls, will justly be given up to their own counsels, to do ill for themselves, even in their outward affairs.

From the time that Amaziah departed from the Lord, so it may be read, ver. 27, the hearts of his subjects departed from him, and they began to form a design against him in Jerusalem. It is probable they were exasperated more for his rashly engaging in a war against Israel, than for his worshipping the gods of Edom. It seems to have been done deliberately, and the act of a considerable body. Thus a man's pride shall bring him low; his ruin may be dated from his turning away from the Lord. May God preserve us from the day of wrath; and prepare our hearts to receive his truth, to welcome his counsels and reproofs, to submit to his authority, and to do his will.

(See 2 Kings 14.)

CHAPTER XXVI.

Ver. 1—15. *Uzziah's good reign in Judah—His prosperity.*

Uzziah did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. He sought God in the days of Zechariah, who was well versed in prophecy, an intelligent, devout, good man, and had great influence. Happy are the great men, who are willing to be advised by such; unhappy those, who seek God only while they have such with them. As long as he sought the Lord, and minded religion, God made him to prosper. Those only prosper, whom God makes to prosper; prosperity is his gift. Religion and piety are friendly to outward prosperity. Many have owned, that as long as they sought the Lord, and kept close to their duty, they prospered; but since they forsook God, every thing has gone cross.

In some instances God is found of them that sought him not; and persons may use the means of grace without receiving sensible increase of grace or peace. But this is not God's usual mode of proceeding, nor does he ever continue either to bless the indolent or to withhold his blessing from the diligent. He will never suffer any to seek his face in vain.—(61.)

Here are instances of his prosperity.

1. His success in his wars. He made all quiet about him, and kept them in awe. 2. His name was celebrated throughout all the neighbouring countries, as a name for good things with God and good people. This makes truly honourable. 3. His buildings. He built towers in Jerusalem, and fortified them. But his best fortification of Jerusalem was close adherence to the worship of God, which if his father had not forsaken, the wall of Jerusalem had not been broken down. He built towers in the desert to protect the country people from arabian plunderers. 4. His husbandry. It is an honour to the husbandman's calling, that one of the most illustrious princes of the house of David followed it, and loved it. He did not delight in war, nor addict himself to sport and pleasure, but delighted in the employments of the husbandman. 5. His armies. So great were their number and valour, that no enemy could stand before them. Engines were invented, in his time, for annoying besiegers with darts and stones shot from towers and bulwarks. What pity it is that the wars and fightings which come from men's lusts, have made men employ their skill to invent instruments of death!

Ver. 16—23. *Uzziah's attempt to burn incense—His punishment and death.*

The only blot on king Uzziah was, his invading the priest's office. The good way is one, by-paths are many; the transgression of his predecessors was, forsaking the temple of the Lord, and burning incense upon idolatrous altars. His transgression was, intruding into the temple of the Lord further than was allowed, and attempting to burn incense upon the altar of God. See how hard it is to avoid one extreme, and not run into another. Pride of heart was at the bottom of his sin; a lust that ruins more than any other whatsoever. When he was grown very great and considerable, instead of lifting up the name of God in gratitude to him who had done so much for him, his heart was lifted up to his destruction. Men's pretending to forbidden knowledge, and exercising themselves in things too high for them, are owing to pride of heart.

His sin was, going into the temple of the Lord to burn incense. The law, he knew, was expressly against him, and there was no usage or precedent for him; he could not pretend any necessity, as there was for David's eating the shew-bread. He

was not content with the honours God had put upon him, but would usurp those that were forbidden, like our first parents. The priests did not resist by violence, though they were valiant men, but by showing him that it was not lawful for him to burn incense. David had blessed the people, Solomon and Jehoshaphat had prayed with them, and preached to them. Uzziah might have done this, and it would have been to his praise; but as for burning incense, that service was to be performed by the priests only. The kingly and priestly offices were separated by the law of Moses, not to be united again but in the person of the Messiah. If Uzziah intended to honour God, and to gain acceptance in what he did, he was quite wrong; for, being a service purely of Divine institution, he could not expect it should be accepted, unless it were done in the way, and by the hands that God had appointed. The incense of our prayers must be, by faith, put into the hands of our Lord Jesus, the great High Priest of our profession, else we cannot expect it to be accepted by God, Rev. 8. 3.

Uzziah was wroth with the priests that reproved him, and would push forward to do what he intended notwithstanding. His punishment was, an incurable leprosy, which rose in his forehead while he was contending with the priests. Some conjecture, that on this occasion was the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, which we read of Amos 1. 1, and Zech. 14. 5. It evidenced religious fear of God in the heart of this king, that, as soon as he found God was angry, he retired. Though he strove with the priests, he would not strive with his Maker. It remained a lasting punishment of his transgression; for he continued a leper to his death, shut out from society, forced to leave his son to manage all his business. Thus God gave an instance of his resisting the proud, and of his jealousy for the purity and honour of his own institutions; thus he gave Uzziah a loud and constant call to repentance, and a long space to repent, which we may hope he improved. The disgrace survived him; for when he was dead, they would not bury him in the sepulchres of the kings, because he was a leper. It was a punishment that answered the sin, as face does to face in a glass. Pride was at the bottom of his transgression, and thus God humbled him, and put dishonour upon him. He invaded the office

of the priests in contempt of them, and God struck him with a disease, which in a particular manner made him subject to the inspection and sentence of the priests; for to them pertained the judgment of the leprosy, Deut. 24. 8. He thrust himself into the temple of God, whither the priests only had admission, and for that, was thrust out of the very courts of the temple, into which the meanest of his subjects that was ceremonially clean, had free access. They that covet forbidden honours, forfeit allowed ones. Adam, by catching at the tree of knowledge which he might not eat of, debarred himself from the tree of life which he might have eaten of. Let all that read, say, The Lord is righteous! And however we may be excluded from the earthly courts of the Lord, the communion of his saints, and the comforts of society, if we are thereby brought to true repentance, we shall bless God for the whole. When the Lord sees good to throw prosperous and useful men aside as broken vessels, if he raises up others to fill their places, they may rejoice to renounce all worldly concerns, and employ their remaining days in preparation for death.

(See 2 Kings 15.)

CHAPTER XXVII.

Jotham's reign in Judah.

Not much more is related concerning Jotham than in 2 Kings 15. What was amiss in his father he amended in himself. We must not imitate the best men any further than they did well; but, on the contrary, their falls, and the injurious consequences, must be warnings to us to walk the more circumspectly, that we stumble not at the same stone as they. The people did yet corruptly. Perhaps it reflects blame upon Jotham, that he was wanting toward the reformation of the land. Men may be very good, and yet not have courage and zeal to do what they might. It certainly reflects a great deal of blame upon the people.

Jotham prospered, and became truly reputable. He began with the gate of the house of the Lord, which he repaired, beautified, and raised. He then took all possible care for fortifying his country, and replenishing it. He prevailed against the ammonites, who had invaded Judah in Jehoshaphat's time, ch. 20. 1. He became mighty. The more stedfast we are in religion, the more mighty we are, both for the resistance of evil, and the

performance of that which is good. He finished his course soon, but finished it with honour. He died when he was but forty-one years of age. The last words of the chapter convey the painful intelligence, that Ahaz his son reigned in his stead, whose character, in all respects, was the reverse of his. When the wealth and power which wise men have done good with, devolve upon fools that will do hurt with them, it is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation. The Lord often prematurely removes wise, prosperous, and pious rulers, and sends others, whose follies and vices severely punish a people who valued not their mercies till they were withdrawn from them. The righteous are taken from the evil to come, and enter into rest: it is a mercy to be spared the anguish of witnessing miseries that are coming on corrupted churches and nations.

3. Ophel was a tower on the city wall, ch. 33. 14; Nehemiah 3. 26.

(See 2 Kings 15. 32—38.)

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The wicked reign of Ahaz in Judah.

Ahaz had a good education given him, and a good example set him; but all instructions were lost upon him. He forsook the temple of the Lord, and sacrificed and burnt incense on the hills, as if those would place him nearer heaven; and under every green tree, as if those would signify the protection and influence of Heaven by their shade and dropping. To complete his wickedness, as one perfectly divested of all natural affection as well as religion, he burnt his children in the fire to Moloch. When he forsook God, and, at a vast expense, put himself under the protection of false gods, the Syrians triumphed over him, and carried away many of his people into captivity. The king of Israel, though an idolater, also was made a scourge, and smote him with a great slaughter. The people suffered by these judgments. They that knew not their happiness in the foregoing reign, were taught it by the miseries of this.

The kingdom of Israel was not strong at this time, yet strong enough to bring great destruction upon Judah. But certainly so many great men, stout men, could not have been cut off in one day, if not dispirited, both by the consciousness of their own guilt, and of the righteous hand of God upon them. When the army

in the field was routed, the cities, and towns, and country villages were all easily stripped, the inhabitants taken for slaves, and their wealth for a prey. But God sent Israel a message by a prophet. He tells them they gained this victory because God was wroth with Judah, and made them the rod of his indignation. He charges them with the abuse of the power God had given them over their brethren, for the cruelty of the slaughter they had made in the field, and the treatment they gave their prisoners. He reminds them of their own sins. It ill becomes sinners to be cruel. You have transgressions enough to answer for already, and need not add this. Could they hope for the mercy of God, if they neither showed mercy nor justice to their brethren? Let it be remembered that every man is our neighbour, and in one sense our brother, our fellow-man, if not our fellow-christian. And no man who is acquainted with the word of God, need fear to maintain that the slave-trade stands in direct opposition to the law of love and the gospel of grace, as well as to the true interests of mankind. Who can hold his brother in bondage without violating the rule of doing to others as he would that they should do unto him? The question is to be decided by the moral law of God, and the tendency of the gospel. But when sinners are left to their own heart's lust, they grow yet more desperate in wickedness, and trespass more and more in defiance of God.

God commands them to release the prisoners, and to send them home again carefully. They discovered an obedient regard to the word of God by his prophet, and a tender compassion toward their brethren, which was wrought in them by the tender mercy of God; for he regarded their affliction, heard their cry, and made them to be pitied of those that carried them captive, Psa. 106. 44, 46. The Lord now brought Judah low. They that will not humble themselves under the word of God, will justly be humbled by his judgments. The Edomites smote Judah, and the Philistines also insulted them. To show that it was the sin of Ahaz that brought the Philistines upon his country, in the very year that he died, Isaiah foretold the destruction of the Philistines by his son, Isa. 14. 28, 29. Ahaz added to the distress, by making court to strange kings, in hopes they would relieve him.

Though he had conformed to the idolatry of the heathen nations, his compliance, by which he lost God, did not gain them, nor could he make any interest in them but with his money. It is often found that wicked men themselves have no real affection for those that revolt to them, nor do they care to do them a kindness.

The forces of the assyrian quartered upon his country, impoverished and weakened it. In his distress, instead of repenting of his idolatry, which he had reason enough to see the folly of, he trespassed yet more. This is that king Ahaz! that wretched man, who was the scandal of the house of David, and the curse and plague of his generation! Those are wicked and vile indeed, that are made worse by their afflictions, instead of being made better by them; who, in their distress, trespass yet more, have their corruptions exasperated by that which should mollify them, and their hearts more fully set in them to do evil. Foolish man! It was the true God, the God of Judah, who strengthened the syrians against him, not the gods of Damascus. But no marvel that men's affections and devotions are misplaced, when they mistake the author of their trouble and of their help. This sin provoked God to bring judgments upon them, to cut Ahaz off in the midst of his days; and it corrupted the people so, that the reformation of the next reign could not cure them of their inclination to idolatry, but they retained that root of bitterness till the captivity in Babylon plucked it up. For aught that appears, Ahaz died impenitent, and therefore died inglorious. The progress of wickedness and misery often is rapid; and it is awful to reflect upon a sinner's being driven away in his wickedness into an eternal world.

20. The king of Assyria helped Ahaz against the syrians: see 2 Kings 16. 9. But he did not assist against the edomites and philistines, and distressed him by taking his treasures.—*T. H. Horne.*

23. The greek version is, For king Ahaz said, I will seek the gods of Damascus who smite me, Because, &c.

(*Read 2 Kings 16.*)

CHAPTER XXIX.

Ver. 1—19. *Hezekiah's good reign in Judah—He cleanses the temple.*

Most important consequences may follow the change of one person in a public station. What an honour it is to be employed in promoting religion and happiness through a kingdom, and how dread-

ful will be their condemnation who diffuse guilt and misery! When power is given to the godly, it should be employed according to the will of God. First actions are of considerable importance, and leave an abiding impression. When Hezekiah came to the crown, he was twenty-five years old, and applied himself immediately to the reformation. We may well think how it had troubled him to see the doors of the temple shut up. Those who begin with God, begin at the right end of their work, and it will prosper accordingly.

Hezekiah's exhortation to the levites is very pathetic. He lays before them the desolations of religion, and the deplorable state to which it was brought among them. The house of God had been deserted. Those that turn their backs upon God's ordinances, may truly be said to forsake God himself. There are still such neglects if the word be not duly read and opened, for that was signified by the lighting the lamps, and also if prayers and praise be not offered up, for that was signified by the burning incense. Hezekiah shows the sad consequences of this neglect and decay; it was the cause of all the calamities they had lain under. He declares his own full purpose and resolution to restore religion, and to make it his business to promote it. He engages and excites the levites and priests to do their duty on this occasion. Be not now negligent. Be not secure. Men's negligence in religion is owing to their carnal security. But the Lord alone can prepare the heart of man for vital godliness: when much good is effected in a little time, the glory must be ascribed to Him; and all who love Him or the souls of men, will rejoice therein.

They did according to the king's command, but with an eye to God's word; the king commanded them what was their duty by the word of God, and, in doing it, they regarded God's word as a rule to them, and the king's commandment as a spur to them. The expedition with which they did this work, was very remarkable. They began on the first day of the first month; thus should every year begin with reformation of what is amiss, and repentance for all the defilements contracted the foregoing year. Let those that do good work, learn to rid work, and get it done.

Ver. 20—36. *Hezekiah's sacrifice of atonement.*

As soon as Hezekiah heard that the

temple was ready, he lost no time. He rose early to go up to the house of the Lord. Atonement must be made for the sins of the last reign. They thought it not enough to lament and forsake those sins, but they brought a sin-offering. Even our repentance and reformation will not obtain pardon but in and through Christ, who was made sin, that is, a sin-offering for us. There is no peace but through his blood.

The sin-offering was for the kingdom, the sanctuary, and for Judah; that is, to make atonement for the sins of princes, priests, and people, for they had all corrupted their way. The law of Moses appointed sacrifices, that the national judgments might be turned away; for this, we must now look to Christ the great Propitiation, as well as for the remission and salvation of particular persons.

The law appointed only one goat for a sin-offering; but they here offered seven; the sins of the congregation had been very great, and long continued. Our great Sin-offering is but one, yet that one perfects for ever them that are sanctified. The king and the representatives of the congregation laid their hands on the heads of the goats that were for the sin-offering, thereby owning themselves guilty before God, and expressing their desire that the guilt of the sinner might be transferred upon the sacrifice. By faith we lay our hands on the Lord Jesus, and so receive the atonement, Rom. 5. 11.

Burnt-offerings were offered with the sin-offerings. The blood of those, as well as of the sin-offering, was sprinkled upon the altar, to make reconciliation for all Israel, and not for Judah only. Christ is a Propitiation, not for the sins of Israel only, but of the whole world, 1 John 2. 2.

While the offerings were burning on the altar, the levites sang the song of the Lord. Even sorrow for sin must not prevent us from praising God. By faith we must rejoice in Christ Jesus as our righteousness; and our prayers and praises must ascend with his offering, to be accepted only in the virtue of it.

The king and all the congregation testified their consent to, and concurrence in all that was done. It is not enough for us to be where God is worshipped, if we do not ourselves worship with the heart. The temple service was to be set up again, that it might be continually kept up. The people, being called by the king,

brought in their offerings, though not in such abundance as in the glorious days of Solomon, for Judah was now brought low, but according to what they had.

The great and sudden change in the conduct of the people, and the readiness with which they joined in measures wherein much opposition had been expected, showed that God had prepared the people; all rejoiced in it as a token that he would prosper them in endeavouring to effect a more complete reformation.

The priests were too few for the service. The levites were better affected to the work, better prepared and qualified for it; this was their praise, and they had the honour to be employed in the priest's work. This was not according to the law, Lev. 1. 5, 6, but the irregularity was dispensed with in cases of necessity; thus encouragement was given to the faithful, zealous levites, and just disgrace put upon the careless priests. And all were pleased. Those who go about the work of God in faith and with resolution, will find there is not that difficulty in it which they sometimes imagine, but it will be a pleasing surprise to them to see how soon it is done.

We need not multiplied sacrifices for sin—the one atonement of Christ is sufficient for all who rely on it; but we need repeated confessions of guilt, constant humiliation before God, and application to the Saviour's blood for forgiveness and acceptance. We should present our spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, and devote ourselves and all we have, as sacrifices acceptable to the Father through the Redeemer. To these things we are called and encouraged through the joyful sound of the gospel; and they are honourable and happy who take the lead in the spiritual service of God, and stir up others thereto.

CHAPTER XXX.

Ver. 1—12. *Hezekiah's preparations for the passover.*

A passover was resolved upon. Hezekiah and his counsellors wisely concluded that the provision which had been made for individuals who were hindered from eating the passover at the appointed season, Numb. 9. 11, might in their present circumstances be extended to the whole congregation. Let the circumstances give way to the substance, and let not the thing itself be lost upon a nicety about the time. Delays are

dangerous. It seems probable that this and other solemn feasts were sometimes omitted for years together, and at other times very carelessly attended, compared with what the law required.

An invitation was sent to the ten revolted tribes to attend. The differences between Judah and Israel, either upon a civil or sacred account, shall not hinder, but that, if the people of Israel will sincerely return to the Lord their God, Hezekiah will bid them as welcome to the passover as any of his own subjects. The temple was the type of those spiritual blessings which are from everlasting to everlasting, upon all God's true people. He never refuses to be reconciled to the penitent. The letters carefully avoided all mention of former differences, or whatever could give any shadow of offence. They only related to the matter of religion. Observe what he pressed them to, Yield yourselves unto the Lord. Say not that you will do what you please, but resolve to do what he pleases. We perceive in the carnal mind a stiffness, an obstinacy, an unaptness to comply with God; we have it from our fathers: this must be conquered. Those who through grace have turned to God themselves, should do all they can to bring others back to him. Observe what arguments he used to persuade them. Could any be expressed more pathetically, more movingly?

No injuries or enmities should render us indifferent about the salvation of any man. Numbers will laugh to scorn, but some will be humbled and benefited; perhaps where least expected. Such attempts should be made in plainness, meekness, and affection; they are peculiarly seasonable when men are suffering for their crimes, and deeper miseries appear at hand. The rich mercy of God is the great argument by which to enforce repentance; the vilest who submit and yield themselves to the Lord, seek his grace, and desire to give themselves to his service, shall certainly be saved. O that messengers were sent forth to carry these invitations to every city and every village, through every land!

It does not appear that Hoshea, who then was king of Israel, gave any opposition to his subjects accepting the invitation. But, for the people, the generality of them slighted the call. The messengers went from city to city, and used pressing entreaties with the people, to

come to Jerusalem to keep the passover; but they not only refused, but refused with disdain. No marvel the king's messengers were despitefully used by this apostate race, when God's messengers, his servants the prophets, were so. The destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes was now at hand; it was but two or three years after this, that the king of Assyria laid siege to Samaria, which ended in the captivity of those tribes. Just before this, they had not only a king of their own that permitted them to return to God's sanctuary, but a king of Judah that earnestly invited them to do it. Had they generally accepted this invitation, it might have prevented their ruin; but their contempt hastened it, and left them inexcusable. Yet there were some few that accepted the invitation. The message, though to some it was a savour of death unto death, was to others a savour of life unto life. In the worst of times God has had a remnant; so he had here. A command was given to the men of Judah to attend this solemnity; they did it with one heart, and the hand of God gave them that one heart; for it is in the day of power that Christ's subjects are made willing. It is God that works both to will and to do. When people, at any time, discover an unexpected forwardness to that which is good, we must acknowledge the hand of God in it.

Ver. 13—20. *The passover celebrated.*

As the people assembled at Jerusalem some days before the passover, they employed the time in clearing the city of idolatrous altars. The zeal and earnestness of the king, princes, and people, made the priests and levites ashamed, and stirred them up to their work. The zeal of others should make us ashamed of our own coldness, and quicken us, not only to do our duty, but to do it well, and to sanctify ourselves to it. They did according to the duty of their place, sprinkling the blood upon the altar, which was a type of Christ our Passover, sacrificed for us.

This solemnity was conducted with much devotion; but, beside being a month out of time, many were permitted to eat the passover who were not purified. Hezekiah prayed to God for the forgiveness of this irregularity. His prayer was short, but to the purpose. The great thing required in our attendance upon God in solemn ordinances, is, that we make heart-work of it; all is nothing

without this. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward part. Where this sincerity and fixedness of heart are, yet there may be many defects and infirmities, short of the purification of the sanctuary. Corruptions may not be so fully conquered, thoughts not so closely fixed, affections not so lively, faith not so operative, as they should be; here is defect in sanctuary purification. There is nothing perfect under the sun, nor a just man that doeth good, and sinneth not. These defects need pardoning, healing grace; for omissions *in* duty are sins, as well as omissions *of* duty. If God should deal with us in strict justice, according to the best of our performances, we were undone. The way to obtain pardon, is to seek it of God by prayer; it must be obtained by petition through the blood of Christ. It is the duty of those who have the charge of others, not only to look to themselves, but to those under their charge, to see wherein they are wanting, and to pray for them; as Hezekiah here. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah; he not only did not lay their sin to their charge, but graciously accepted their services; healing denotes not only forgiveness, Isa. 6. 10; Psa. 103. 3, but comfort and peace, Isa. 57. 18; Mal. 4. 2.

When humbled for our transgressions, at war with our idols, and seeking forgiveness through the atonement of Christ, we become welcome guests at the Lord's table. The unhumbled and impenitent, the man who lives in known sin, or he that trusts in his own righteousness, may pretend to commemorate the death of Christ, but they are intruders, who come to the marriage feast without the wedding garment. Yet though the sinner's views are feeble, obscure, and his approach not exactly regular, he is not to be discouraged. Our blessed Advocate, who breaks not the bruised reed, intercedes for such inquirers, and our good Lord will pardon every one of them. No trembling believer, who desires to obey the plain command of the Redeemer, need be alarmed lest he fail in the exactness he supposes to be required in the ordinance. Preparation is profitable for this and other ordinances, but the true believer is habitually ready, and ought not to retire for want of such preparation. Yet every defect is sin, and needs forgiveness; and should be matter of humiliation, but not of discouragement, though

nothing can compensate for the want of a heart prepared to seek the Lord.

Ver. 21—27. *The feast of unleavened bread.*

After the passover followed the feast of unleavened bread. Abundance of sacrifices were offered to God in peace-offerings, by which they both acknowledged and implored the favour of God; and on part the offerers feasted with their friends during these seven days, in token of their communion with God, and the comfort they took in his favour, and their reconciliation to him. It was generous of the king and the princes, thus plentifully to entertain the whole congregation. Christ feasted those who followed him.

Many good prayers were put up to God with the peace-offerings. They made a religious confession of their relation to God, and dependence upon him; a penitent confession of their sins and infirmities; a thankful confession of God's mercies to them; and a supplicatory confession of their wants and desires: in all these they looked to God as the God of their fathers, a God in covenant with them. There was also abundance of good preaching. The levites, whose office it was, Deut. 33. 10, read and opened the scriptures, and instructed the congregation; there was great need of it, after so long a famine of the word as had been in the last reign. Hezekiah attended the preaching, and encouraged it. Princes and magistrates, by owning and encouraging faithful and laborious preachers, greatly serve the interest of God's kingdom among men. Faith cometh by hearing, and true religion has always flourished according to the measure in which faithful, scriptural preaching has abounded.

They sang psalms every day, thus expressing their own, and exciting one another's joy in God, and thankfulness to him. Praising God should be much of our work in our religious assemblies. Having kept the seven days of the feast in this religious manner, they had so much comfort in it, that they kept other seven days. Many were a great way from home, and this being the second month, they were in the midst of harvest; yet they were in no haste to return. All this they did with gladness. Holy duties should be performed with holy gladness; we should be forward to them, and take pleasure in them, relish the sweetness of communion with God, and look upon it as matter of unspeakable joy and comfort, that we are

thus favoured, and have such earnestness of everlasting joy. And when sinners humble themselves before the Lord, they may expect gladness in his ordinances. Their confessions of sin will be made pleasant by the tokens of forgiveness, and by the grateful love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost. Those who taste this happiness will not soon grow weary of it, but will be glad to prolong the enjoyment.

The congregation was at length dismissed with a solemn blessing. What a comfort is it to a congregation to be sent home thus crowned! The voice of the priests, when they blessed the people, was heard in heaven, and came up to the habitation of God's holiness. The prayer that comes up to heaven in a cloud of incense, will come down again to this earth in showers of blessings. Our great High Priest never fails to plead for every believer, and he never pleads in vain. A few more conflicts and temptations must be passed through, yet in Him we may have peace, and we shall be with Him, and then our rejoicing will be eternal.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Hezekiah destroys idolatry—The maintenance of the priests provided for.

After the passover all the people of Israel that had attended applied themselves with vigour to destroy all the monuments of idolatry. They did this, not only in the cities of Judah and Benjamin, but in those of Ephraim and Manasseh; those which were come under the kings of Judah; or, Hoshea king of Israel not forbidding it, their zeal carried them to destroy idolatry, even in many parts of his kingdom. They destroyed all, they spared none. Those who sincerely set themselves against sin, will set themselves against *all* sin. They would not return to their houses, though long absent, till this was done. The finishing of one duty should be the beginning of another, and he that delights in God's commandments will not complain of this as a weariness. Public ordinances should stir us up to cleanse our hearts, our houses, and shops, from the filth of sin, and the idolatry of covetousness, and to excite others to do the same. The after-improvement of solemn ordinances is of the greatest importance to personal, family, and public religion.

The temple service was put into method again. Every man was made to know

his work, his place, his time, and what was expected from him. Good order contributes much to the carrying on of a good work. Hezekiah appropriated a branch of his revenue to the support of the altar. Let princes and great men reckon that well bestowed, which they give for the support of religion in their country. He issued an order that they should carefully pay their dues, according to the law, to the priests and levites. This had been long neglected, which made the work to be neglected: for a scandalous maintenance makes a scandalous ministry. Observe the end Hezekiah aims at in recovering to the priests and levites their portion—that they might be encouraged in the study of the law of the Lord, and in doing their duty accordingly.

The people wanted but to be called upon: as soon as the commandment came abroad, the first-fruits and all the holy things were duly brought in. What the priests had occasion for they used, and the overplus was laid in heaps. It is observable, that after they had tasted the sweetness of God's ordinance in the late passover, they were thus free in maintaining the temple service. They that experience the benefit of a settled ministry, will not grudge the expense of it. The holy things being brought in, Hezekiah provided that they should not be left exposed in loose heaps, liable to be wasted and embezzled; he ordered chambers to be made ready in some of the courts of the temple for store chambers. The priests and levites had certain portions allotted to them, also to their children and wives, also for all when absent from the temple and in their several districts. Thus none appropriated an unequal proportion, and none went without a suitable provision. They separated themselves from other employments, and devoted themselves to serve God, in a holy and believing expectation that he would provide for them. They were not disappointed. This regular provision kept them from being entangled by worldly cares to the neglect of their ministry.

Hezekiah acted with equity in all these regulations, and his heart was upright with God. In all that he attempted in God's service, he was earnest and single in his aim and dependence, and was prospered accordingly. What an encouraging example is this! Whether we have few or many talents intrusted to us, may we

thus seek to improve them, and encourage others to do the same. We shall be prospered in some measure, and obtain that honour which cometh from God; Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of the Lord! Disinterestedness and frugality are most requisite in those who manage charities or other public funds. When proper care is taken of the sums contributed, and they are expended for the purposes intended, further contributions are encouraged. What is undertaken with a sincere regard to the glory of God, will succeed to our own honour and comfort at last.

21. From Prov. 25. 1, it may be inferred that Hezekiah employed some skilful scribes to compare and write out copies of the law and other sacred writings.—*Boothroyd*.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Ver. 1—23. *The invasion of Sennacherib—His defeat.*

Here is the formidable design of Sennacherib against Hezekiah's kingdom, and the preparation which Hezekiah prudently made. Those who trust God with their safety, must yet use proper means, else they tempt him, and do not trust him. God will provide, but so must we also. He gathered his people together, and spake comfortably to them. A believing confidence in God will raise us above the prevailing fear of man. He that feareth the fury of the oppressor, forgetteth the Lord his Maker, Isa. 51. 12, 13. It is probable that Hezekiah said more to this purport, and that the people rested on the things he said concerning the presence of God and his power. The belief of this made them easy. Let the good subjects and soldiers of Jesus Christ rest thus upon his word, and boldly say, Since God is for us, who can be against us?

The rage and blasphemy of Sennacherib, Hezekiah's prayer, and the deliverance of Jerusalem by the destruction of the assyrian army, we had recorded more at large in the book of Kings. Many brought gifts unto the Lord, when they saw the great power of God in the defence of his people. Strangers were thereby induced to supplicate his favour, and enemies to deprecate his wrath, and both brought gifts to his temple, in token of their care and desire. Hezekiah was magnified as the favourite and particular care of Heaven. By the favour of God, enemies are lost, and friends gained.

5. On comparing Isa. 22. 9, with 2 Chron. 32.

5, it will be evident that the prophet alludes in that chapter, in the plainest terms, to the warlike preparations of Hezekiah for the defence of the city.—*Townsend*.

(*See remarks on 2 Kings 18, 19.*)

Ver. 24—33. *Hezekiah's sickness and recovery—His prosperous reign and death.*

The history of Hezekiah is concluded with an account of his sickness, and his recovery from it: see 2 Kings 20. Also of his sin, and his repentance; this was also more largely related, 2 Kings 20; yet several things are observed here concerning it, which we had not there. The king of Babylon's embassy came to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, either the destruction of the assyrian army or the going back of the sun. God left Hezekiah to himself to try him. God, by the power of his almighty grace, could have prevented the sin, but he permitted it for wise and holy ends; that, by this trial and his weakness in it, Hezekiah might know, that is, it might be known, what was in his heart; that he was not so perfect in grace as he thought he was. It is good for us to know ourselves, and our own weakness and sinfulness, that we may not be conceited, or self-confident, but may always live in dependence upon Divine grace. We know not the corruption of our own hearts, nor what we shall do if God leaves us to ourselves. If we are not left to expose our foolish and wicked pride before the world, yet the Lord sees and abhors the rising of it in our hearts. We need to pray always that the Lord would not leave us to ourselves. We may well respect the memories, and imitate the examples of those who have been pious and useful in their generations.

His sin was, that his heart was lifted up. When Hezekiah had destroyed other idolatries, he began to idolize himself. What need have great men, and good men, and useful men, to study their own infirmities and follies, and their obligations to free grace, that they may never think highly of themselves; but beg earnestly of God, that he will hide pride from them, and always keep them humble! The aggravation of his sin was, that he made so bad a return to God for his favours to him, making even those favours the food and fuel of his pride.

It will be to little purpose to pray that God will not lead us into temptation, if we presumptuously rush into it of our own accord. Let us then shun the occasions of sin: let us avoid the company,

the amusements, the books, yea, the very sights that may administer to sin. Let us commit ourselves continually to God's care and protection; and beg of him never to leave us nor forsake us.—(61.)

Hezekiah was under the Divine displeasure for his sin. Pride is a sin that God hates as much as any other, and particularly in his own people. They that exalt themselves must expect to be abased, and put under humbling providences. We find he humbled himself for the pride of his heart. Though God may, for wise and holy ends, suffer his people to fall into sin, yet he will not suffer them to lie still in it; they shall not be utterly cast down. Heart sins are to be repented of, though they go no further. Self-humiliation is a necessary branch of repentance. Pride of heart, by which we have lifted up ourselves, is a sin, for which we ought in a special manner to humble ourselves. People ought to mourn for the sins of their rulers. The inhabitants of Jerusalem humbled themselves with Hezekiah; they had been guilty of the same sin, or at least feared they might share in the punishment.

An account is given of the honour done to Hezekiah by the providence of God while he lived. Among his great performances, his turning the watercourse of Gihon is mentioned, which was done upon occasion of Sennacherib's invasion. He gathered the waters into a new place, for the greater convenience of the city, called the lower pool, Isa. 22. 9. He prospered in all his works, for they were good works. The people did him honour at his death; the honour of serious godliness is manifested in the consciences of men.

A better recompence awaited him in the world of glory; and at the resurrection of the just he will receive the public approbation of men, of angels, and of God. Who does not say, Let me die the death of the righteous? Be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises, and give diligence to make your calling and election sure.—(60.)

Reader, do not let this part of Hezekiah's history pass before you without making suitable improvement from it. It shows that all men, the best of men, are full of infirmities, and have nothing to boast of before God. Where shall we find any but Jesus that is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and without guile.—(37.)

Blessed be God, death will soon end

the believer's conflict. Then pride and every sin will be abolished. He will no more be tempted to intercept the praise which belongs to the God of his salvation. (See 2 Kings 20.)

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Ver. 1—20. *Manasseh's wickedness and repentance.*

This account of the great wickedness of Manasseh is almost word for word with 2 Kings 21. 1—9. The aggravation of the sin of Manasseh was, that God spake to him and his people by the prophets, but they would not hearken, ver. 10. We may here admire the grace of God in speaking to them, that their badness did not quite turn away his goodness.

We have seen Manasseh's wickedness, here we have his repentance, and a memorable instance it is of the riches of God's pardoning mercy, and the power of his renewing grace. This very man became an eminent instance of the power, riches, and freeness of Divine mercy. When he and his people had long disregarded the prophets, and added murders to their other crimes, the Lord brought upon them the captains of the king of Assyria. Manasseh attempted to conceal himself, but was taken and sent to Babylon. Deprived of his liberty, separated from his evil counsellors and companions, without any prospect but of ending his days in a wretched prison, Manasseh reflected upon what had passed. His atrocious crimes were set before him; he recollected the warnings and instructions of the prophets. By the blessing of God, solitude and deliverance brought him to review his conduct; he began to cry for mercy and deliverance. He confessed his sins, condemned himself, was abased before God, abhorring his crimes, and loathing himself as a monster of ingratitude, impiety, and iniquity. Yet he hoped to be pardoned through the abundant mercy of the Lord. The Lord graciously accepted these supplications; he inclined the king of Assyria to liberate his prisoner, and reinstate him in his authority. Then Manasseh knew that Jehovah was God, alone able to punish or to deliver. He knew him as a God of salvation, learned to fear, trust in, love, and obey him. From this time he bore a new character, and walked in newness of life.

Who can tell what tortures of conscience, what pangs of grief, what fears of

wrath, what agonizing remorse he endured, when he looked back on his many years of apostasy and rebellion against God, on his having led thousands into sin and perdition; and on his blood-guiltiness in the persecution of a number of God's children?—(7.)

When Manasseh was brought back to his God and to his duty, he was soon brought back to his kingdom. See how ready God is to accept and welcome returning sinners, and how swift to show mercy. Let not great sinners despair, when Manasseh himself, upon his repentance, found favour with God; in him God showed forth a pattern of long-suffering, as 1 Tim. 1. 16; Isa. 1. 18. He brought forth fruits meet for repentance, after his return to his own land. Now, he used his power to reform his people, as before he had abused it to corrupt them. Those who truly repent of their sins, will not only return to God themselves, but will do all they can to restore those that have by their example been seduced and drawn away from God; else they do not thoroughly, as they ought, seek to undo what they have done amiss. We find Manasseh could not carry the reformation so far as he had carried the corruption. It is easy to corrupt men's manners, but not so easy to reform them again. But there is no intimation that the Lord did not accept his endeavours as genuine fruits of true repentance. He was buried privately, and no honour was done him at his death as was done to his father. Penitents may recover comfort sooner than credit.

The repeated mention of his prayer and of his being humbled, should be noticed. This humble, supplicating frame of mind, forms a crisis in the sinner's case. He enters upon a new state, and commences a new life, however vile he has been before. Wherever there is a sinner of whom it can truly be said, He prayeth, there will the Lord be found a God that heareth prayer. When he renounces all hope but in the mercy of God, and every plea but in the Redeemer's name, and seeks forgiveness and salvation before all other things, he will assuredly find access and acceptance. The blood of Christ cleanseth such from all sin. Let then sinners be willing to know their case. Let them consider their pains and sorrows as so many calls to humble themselves before the Lord, and to call upon him. Let them not yield to discouragement, but pray always and not

faint. Let pardoned sinners exert themselves to show their gratitude and to glorify the God of their salvation. Let them walk humbly before him, endeavouring the conversion of their fellow-sinners, making a contrary use of their wealth, abilities, and influence from what they did before.

Who can complain that the way of heaven is blocked up against him when he sees such a sinner enter? Say the worst against thyself, here is such a one that finds the way to repentance. If thou art even worse than he, yet deny if thou canst to thyself that which God hath not denied to thee, capacity for repentance, yet know it is not thy sin, but thy impenitence that bars heaven against thee.—(34.)

11. The king of Babylon was now become king of Assyria, and he carried away the treasures of Judah as Isaiah had foretold, 2 Kings 20. 17, 18.

(See 2 Kings 21. 1—18.)

Ver. 21—25. *Amon's wicked reign in Judah.*

Amon did as Manasseh had done in the days of his apostasy. Manasseh was defective, that when he cast out the images, he did not utterly deface and destroy them, according to the law which required them to burn the images with fire, Deut. 7. 5. How necessary that law was, this instance shows; for the carved images being only thrown by, and not burnt, Amon set them up, and sacrificed to them. It is added, He trespassed more and more. His father did ill, but he did worse. Whatever warnings or convictions he had, he never humbled himself. He was soon cut off in his sins, and made a warning for all men not to abuse the example of God's patience and mercy to Manasseh, as an encouragement to continue in sin. May God help us to be honest to ourselves, and to form a just conclusion respecting our own character, before death, which may come sooner than we expect, fixes us in an unchangeable state.

(See 2 Kings 21. 19—26.)

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Josiah's good reign in Judah—His zeal for reformation—The book of the law found.

The work of the reformation by Josiah is more largely and particularly related in the Kings. His zeal carried him to do this, not only in Judah and Jerusalem, but in the cities of Israel also, as far as he had any influence. As the years of infancy must be lost as to usefulness to our fellow-creatures; our earliest youth should be dedicated to God, that we may not waste any of the remaining short space of

life. Happy and wise are those who seek the Lord and prepare for usefulness, at the period when others are pursuing sinful pleasures, contracting bad habits, and forming ruinous connexions. None can express the anguish prevented by early piety, or the blessed effects that follow.

In nations which profess to worship God, diligent examination would discover many abominations. Even in worshipping congregations, an exact scrutiny would bring to light many evils—but the most humbling discoveries will be made by an exact inquiry by every one of us, into our own hearts and conduct. Diligent self-examination and watchfulness will give increasing conviction of the deceitfulness and wickedness of our own hearts, and the sinfulness of our lives, even in those of us who consider our behaviour unexceptionable, and our hearts good. And if we set about amendment, in dependence on the mercy and grace of God in Jesus Christ, and according to the rule of the bible, we shall find, as we proceed, more and more to be done. And when the Lord enables us to act conscientiously, according to our present knowledge, he will give us further and clearer views of the truth. The more we are acquainted with God's word, the more clearly we perceive our own guilt and danger; but when this produces godly sorrow, humiliation, and inquiries after the will of God, an answer of peace may be expected. We are here encouraged to humble ourselves before God, and to seek unto him, as Josiah did. If we cannot prevail to turn away God's wrath from our land, yet we shall deliver our own souls. And good people are here taught not to fear death, but to welcome it, when it takes them away from the evil to come. See how it is altered by making it the matter of a promise; Thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace; housed in that ark, as Noah, when a deluge is coming.

All his days the people departed not from following the Lord. All his days were days of restraint upon them; but this intimated that there was in them a bent to backslide, a strong inclination to idolatry; many wanted to have him out of the way, and then they would have their high-places and their images up again. And therefore we find that in the days of Josiah, Jer. 3. 6, God charged it upon treacherous Judah, that she had not returned to him with all her heart, and

thereby had even justified backsliding Israel. They had gone on to provoke God to anger, Jer. 25. 3—7. And, which is very observable, it is from the beginning of Josiah's reformation, his twelfth or thirteenth year, that the iniquity of the house of Judah, which brought ruin upon them, and which the prophet was to bear, lying on his right side, was dated, Ezek. 4. 6; for from thence to the destruction of Jerusalem was just forty years. Josiah was sincere in what he did, but the generality of the people hankered after their idols still; so that the reformation, though well designed, and well prosecuted by the prince, had little or no effect upon the people. This God saw, therefore, from that time, when one would have thought the foundations had been laid for a perpetual security and peace, from that very time did the decree go forth for their destruction. Nothing hastens the ruin of a people, nor ripens them for it more, than the baffling of hopeful attempts for reformation, and a hypocritical return to God. Be not deceived, God is not mocked.

The long current and tide of affections only turns at the command of His voice who raiseth the dead in trespasses and sins. But we behold peculiar loveliness in the grace the Lord bestows on those whose tender years are seasoned with the love of Jesus. Hath Jesus, the Day-spring from on high, visited you? Can you trace your knowledge of this light and life of man, like Josiah, from your youth? Oh the unspeakable happiness of knowing him from a child, and becoming acquainted with Jesus from our earliest years! What can equal the joy of the soul, rising out of the Lord's manifestation of himself, when speaking to a believer as unto Josiah, Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before me, I have heard thee also, saith the Lord!—(37.)

9. Instead of, "And they returned to Jerusalem," we should read, "And the inhabitants of Jerusalem."—*Greenfield.*

(See 2 Kings 22.)

CHAPTER XXXV.

Ver. 1—19. *The passover kept by Josiah.*

The destruction Josiah made of idolatry was more largely related in the Kings. But his solemnizing the passover, 2 Kings 23. 21, is particularly related here. Many were the feasts of the Lord appointed by the ceremonial law, but the passover was the chief. It began them all, in the night

wherein Israel came out of Egypt ; it concluded them all in the night, wherein Christ was betrayed ; and in the celebration of it, Hezekiah and Josiah, those two great reformers, revived religion in their day. The ordinance of the Lord's supper resembles the passover more than any other of the jewish festivals ; and the due observance of that ordinance according to the rule, is an instance and means, both of the growing purity and beauty of churches, and of the growing piety and devotion of christians. Religion cannot flourish where that passover is wholly neglected, or not duly observed.

In Hezekiah's passover, the great zeal and devout affection of the people was observable ; but little of that appears here. They kept the passover more in compliance with the king than from inclination to it themselves : some pride they took in this form of godliness, but little pleasure in the power of it. But whatever defect there was among the people in the heart work of the duty, the magistrates and the ministers did their part, and took care that the service should be performed with solemnity. The king, and the princes, influenced by his example, gave liberally for bearing the charges of this passover. The ceremonial services were expensive. People had not zeal enough to be at the charge of them ; nor were they now very fond of them, for that reason. Therefore, Josiah, at his own proper cost, furnished the congregation with paschal lambs, and other sacrifices, to be offered during the seven days of the feast ; and after his example, his nobles, and the chief of the priests and levites, liberally assisted their poorer brethren.

The priests and levites honoured God by keeping the passover. Let not ministers think that the care they take for the souls of others will excuse their neglect of their own ; or that being employed in public worship, will supersede the religious exercises of their closets and families. The whole solemnity was performed with great exactness, according to the law ; and, upon that account, there was none like it since Samuel's time. God alone can truly sanctify and prepare our hearts for his holy services ; but there are duties belonging to us, respecting ourselves and each other, in the performance of which we obtain this blessing from the Lord, and become instrumental to each other's benefit. Vast exertions are requisite to produce

an outward attendance to religion ; but the grace of God alone can convert the heart.

Ver. 20—27. *Josiah opposes the king of Egypt, and is slain in battle.*

The scripture does not condemn Josiah's conduct in resisting Pharaoh's passage through his territories. It appears that Josiah was in possession of the land of Israel, not of Judah only, probably by a grant of the king of Babylon, and was bound to act against his enemies. Doubtless the kings of Judah had been dependent on those of Assyria and Babylon, since the time of Manasseh. Pharaoh was in the heart of Josiah's kingdom before he sent the embassy, and then he avowed an intention of attacking his ally. The word God, as used by Necho, may signify his own gods as well as the God of Israel ; and it is noted that the expression, "from the mouth of God," is nowhere else used in the hebrew, for a revelation from the true God ; but that is always expressed, "from the mouth of the Lord." Yet Josiah seems to deserve censure for his precipitation, and for not inquiring of the Lord after he was thus warned ; his death might therefore be a rebuke for his rashness, but it was chiefly a judgment on a hypocritical and wicked people. He that habitually lives a life of repentance, faith, and obedience, cannot be affected by the manner in which he is suddenly removed.

Though the people would not imitate Josiah's piety, and disliked his reformation ; yet they respected his character, were sensible they suffered great loss, and lamented him. Many mourn over their calamities, who will not forsake the sins that provoked God to inflict them. Yet this alone can avert judgments. What Jeremiah composed on this occasion has not come down to us. His Lamentations were written on the destruction of Jerusalem.

If we censure Josiah's last expedition, we should be warned to watchfulness, lest we be cut down in a way dishonourable to our profession. Let us be doing the work of the Lord, that when he shall call, we may not be surprised or terrified, but cheerfully obey the call. But, if living in disregard of God and his salvation, in what manner can you meet your dissolution ? What is your support ? Can you look at death, and say, I am persuaded that it shall not be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus my Lord ? Do you not rather tremble

in the fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries? Seize the present moment, and flee to Him whose grace alone can prepare you for your dismissal, so that you may adopt the words of the apostle, O death, where is thy sting? Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.—(60.)

20. Charchemish is probably the Cercusium of the ancients, now called Karkisa, near the junction of the Khabour and the Euphrates.

(See 2 Kings 23.)

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Ver. 1—21. *The evil and unhappy reigns of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, in Judah—The destruction of Jerusalem.*

The destruction of Judah and Jerusalem came on by degrees. The history of these reigns was more largely recorded in the three last chapters of the book of Kings. We have here an account of the destruction of the kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem by the chaldeans. Abraham, "the friend of God," was called out of that country, from Ur of the chaldees, when God took him into covenant and communion with himself; and now his degenerate seed were carried into that country again. The great sin that brought this destruction was idolatry. The great aggravation of their sin was their abuse of God's prophets, who were sent to call them to repentance. The prophets that were sent were diligent and faithful. The more pains ministers take in their work, the more will the people have to answer for, if it be all in vain. God by his prophets thus strove with them, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place, and would by these means have prevented their ruin. The methods God takes to reclaim sinners by his word, by ministers, by conscience, by providences, are all instances of his compassion toward them, and his unwillingness that any should perish.

The ill usage they gave Jeremiah, who lived at this time, which we read much of in the book of his prophecy, was an evidence of an implacable enmity to God, and an invincible resolution to go on in their sins. This brought wrath upon them, without remedy, for it was sinning against the remedy. The desolation itself, and some of the particulars of it, we had 2 Kings 25. Let us see here what woful havoc sin makes, and, as we tender

the comfort and continuance of our estates, keep that worm from the root of them.

The remainder of the people that escaped the sword were carried captives to Babylon. Now they sat down by the rivers of Babylon, with the streams of which they mingled their tears, Psa. 137. 1. And though there, it should seem, they were cured of idolatry; yet, as appears by the prophet Ezekiel, they were not cured of mocking the prophets. The land lay desolate while they were captives in Babylon. That fruitful land, the glory of all lands, was now not tilled, nor husbanded—all lay neglected. Now the land enjoyed her sabbaths, as God had declared by Moses, Lev. 26. 34, 35, and the reason there given is, "Because it did not rest on your sabbaths, you profaned the sabbath day, did not observe the sabbatical year." They many times ploughed and sowed their land in the seventh year when it should have rested, and now it lay unploughed and unsown for ten times seven years. God will be no loser in his glory at last, by the disobedience of men, Hos. 2. 9. If they would not let the land rest, God would make it rest. Some think they had neglected the observance of seventy sabbatical years, and so many the land now enjoyed. Yet this intimated, that the land was not to be given to another people, because the israelites were to be reinstated in it. We find also that one of the quarrels God had with them at this time, was, for not observing another law which related to the seventh year, and that was the release of servants: see Jer. 34. 13, &c.

O Jerusalem! the wonder of all times, the glory of the earth, the favourite of Heaven, how art thou now become heaps of ashes, hills of rubbish, a spectacle of desolation, a monument of ruin! How carefully had thy God forewarned thee! Lo now, as thine iniquities so thy judgments have overtaken thee. What place, O God, shall thy justice spare, if Jerusalem have perished? If that delight of thine were cut off for her wickedness, let us not be high-minded, but fear.—(34.)

Ver. 22, 23. *The proclamation of Cyrus for the restoration of Jerusalem.*

The two last verses of this book look back to the prophecy of Jeremiah, and show how that was accomplished. God had, by him, promised the restoring of the captives, and the rebuilding of Jeru-

saalem, at the end of seventy years; and that time to favour Zion, that set time, came at last. These verses also look forward to the history of Ezra, which begins with the repetition of them. We learn from them, that though God's church be cast down, it is not cast off; though his people be corrected, they are not abandoned; though thrown into the furnace, yet not lost there, nor left there any longer than till the dross be separated. Though God contend long, he will not contend always. The Israel of God shall be fetched out of Babylon in due time, and even the dry bones made to live. It may be long first; but the vision is for an appointed time, and at the end it shall speak and not lie; therefore, though it tarry, wait for it. And when the executioners of vengeance have cut off the most desperate transgressors, and the rest are humbled by their sufferings and for their sins, the Lord will stir up some instrument of his mercy to be the deliverer of the afflicted.

During the latter part of the period recorded in this book, God was pleased to raise up eminent prophets, who committed their prophecies to writing for the use of his church in all ages. This was a great advance in the affair of redemption, as will appear, if we consider that the main business of the prophets was to point out

Christ and his redemption. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy, Rev. 19. 10. We find that most of the prophets in their writings mainly insist upon Christ and his redemption, and the glorious times of the gospel, which should be in the latter days; and though many other things were spoken of by them, yet they seem to be only introductory to their prophecies of these things. Whatever they predict, here their prophecies commonly terminate.—(21.)

Pause, reader! and before you close the book of the Chronicles, which contains a faithful register of events, think what desolation sin hath introduced into the world, nay, even into the church of God! Who but must tremble at the relation of what is here recorded, and though in the character of some few gracious souls, we discover that the Lord left not himself without witness, yet how is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed! And when you have contemplated this faithful portrait of man by nature, behold what that same nature is, when recovered by Almighty grace, in the person, purchase, cleansing, justifying, and soul-adorning righteousness of God our Saviour. O thou, the Hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof, be thou the Refuge of all thy people in the day of their adversity.—(37.)

A TABLE OF THE MOST REMARKABLE PARALLEL PASSAGES OF THE BOOKS OF CHRONICLES, AND THOSE OF SAMUEL AND KINGS.

1 Chronicles with . . .	1 Samuel.
10. 1—12.	31.
	2 Samuel.
11. 1—9.	5. 1—10.
11. 10—41.	23. 8—39.
13. 1—14.	6. 3—11.
14. 1—17.	5. 11—25.
17.	7.
18.	8.
19.	10.
20. 1—3.	11. 1; 12. 30, 31.
20. 4—8.	21. 18—22.
21.	24.
2 Chronicles with . . .	1 Kings.
1. 3—13.	3. 4—14.
1. 14—17.	10. 26—29.
2.	5. 15—32.
3. }	{ 6.
4. }	{ 7.
5. 2—14; 6. 7—10.	8. 1—11.
6. 12—40; 7. 4—10.	8. 12—53; 62—66.
7. 12—22.	9. 1—9.
8. 1—18.	10. 11—28.
9. 1—12.	10. 1—10.
9. 13—31.	10. 14—29.

2 Chronicles with . . .	1 Kings.
10. 1—19; 11. 1—4.	12. 1—24.
12. 2—11.	14. 25—28.
16. 1—6.	15. 17—22.
18.	22. 2—35.
20. 31—37.	22. 41—50.
	2 Kings.
21. 6—10.	8. 17—24.
22. 2—6.	8. 26—29.
22. 10—12; 23.	11.
24. 1—14.	12. 1—16.
25. 1—4, 11, 17—24.	14. 1—14.
25. 27, 28.	14. 19, 20.
26. 1, 2.	14. 21, 22.
27. 1—3.	15. 33—35.
28. 1—4.	16. 2—4.
29. 1, 2.	18. 2, 3.
32. 9—21.	18. 17—37.
32. 24—31.	20. 1—19.
33. 1—10.	21. 1—10.
34. 1, 2, 8—28.	22.
34. 29—33.	23. 1—20.
35. 18, 20—25.	23. 22, 23.
36. 1.	23. 29, 30.
36. 2—4.	23. 31—34.

As the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles relate the same histories, they should be constantly read and collated together, to obtain a more comprehensive view of Jewish history, also to illustrate or amend from one book what is obscure in either of the others.—*T. H. Horne.*

A COMPARATIVE VIEW OF THE REIGNS OF THE KINGS OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL.

JUDAH.	B. C.		ISRAEL.	B. C.	
	Usher.	Hales.		Usher.	Hales.
<i>Rehoboam.</i>			<i>Jeroboam.</i>		
Revolt of the ten tribes	975	990	Idolatry of the golden calves	975	990
Invasion of Shishak	971		The prophet of Bethel	974	
<i>Abijah</i> succeeds his father	958	973			
His victory over Jeroboam	957		<i>Jeroboam</i> overcome by <i>Abijah</i>	957	
			<i>Nadab</i> succeeds his father	954	968
<i>Asa</i> succeeds his father	955	970	<i>Baasha</i> succeeds his father, who is slain	953	966
His covenant	941		He builds Ramah	930	
War with <i>Baasha</i>	930		<i>Elah</i> succeeds his father	930	943
			He is murdered by <i>Zimri</i>	929	942
			<i>Zimri</i> dethroned by <i>Omri</i>	929	
			<i>Omri</i> reigns jointly with <i>Tibni</i> , till . .	925	
<i>Asa</i> diseased in his feet	917		<i>Omri</i> builds Samaria	924	
<i>Jehoshaphat</i> succeeds his father . . .	914	929	<i>Ahab</i> succeeds his father	918	931
He expels superstitious worship . . .	912				
			<i>Elijah</i> foretells a famine	910	
			<i>Elijah's</i> sacrifice	906	
			Syrians defeated	901	
			<i>Ahaziah</i> associated with his father . .	898	
Expedition against Ramoth-gilead . .	897		<i>Ahaziah</i> succeeds his father	897	909
A fleet equipped for Ophir	896		He is hurt by a fall, and dies	896	
<i>Elisha</i> procures water for the armies .	895		<i>Jehoram</i> succeeds his brother	896	907
<i>Jehoram</i> associated with his father . .	892		<i>Elijah</i> taken up to heaven	896	
<i>Jehoram</i> succeeds his father	890	904			
Introduces idolatry—is smitten with dis-			<i>Benhadad</i> besieges Samaria	892	
ease	887		<i>Jehoram</i> wounded at Ramoth-gilead .	884	
<i>Ahaziah</i> succeeds his father	885	806	<i>Jehu</i> slays him and takes the throne .	884	895
Slain by <i>Jehu</i>	884		<i>Jonah</i> preaches at Nineveh about . .	862	
<i>Athaliah</i> , his mother, usurps the throne	884	895			
<i>Joash</i> anointed king, and <i>Athaliah</i> slain	878	889	<i>Jehoahaz</i> succeeds his father	856	867
He orders the temple to be repaired .	856		<i>Jehoash</i> associated with his father . .	841	
<i>Jehoiada</i> dies	842		<i>Jehoash</i> , or <i>Joash</i> , succeeds his father	839	850
<i>Zechariah</i> stoned	840				
<i>Amaziah</i> succeeds his father	839	849	<i>Jeroboam II.</i> succeeds his father . .	825	834
He challenges <i>Jehoash</i> , and is overcome	826		His success, as prophesied by <i>Jonah</i> .	808	
He is slain, and an interregnum follows	810	820	<i>Jeroboam II.</i> dies, an interregnum follows	784	793
<i>Azariah</i> or <i>Uzziah</i> succeeds his father	810	809	<i>Zachariah</i> his son made king, and mur-		
			dered by	773	771
			<i>Shallum</i> , who, in a month, is killed by	772	770
He attempts to burn incense, and is			<i>Menahem</i> , who succeeds to the throne .	772	770
smitten with leprosy	765		<i>Pekahiah</i> succeeds his father	761	760
<i>Jotham</i> succeeds his father	758	757	<i>Pekah</i> murders and succeeds him . .	759	758
			Part of Israel carried into captivity .	740	740
<i>Ahaz</i> succeeds his father	742	741	<i>Pekah</i> slain by <i>Hoshea</i> , anarchy ensues	739	738
Judah oppressed by <i>Rezin</i> and <i>Pekah</i> .	741		<i>Hoshea</i> begins to reign	730	728
<i>Ahaz</i> pays tribute to the king of Assyria	740		Israel made tributary by <i>Salmaneser</i> .	728	
			<i>Hoshea</i> , king of Israel, refuses to pay		
<i>Hezekiah</i> succeeds his father	727	725	tribute to <i>Salmaneser</i> , who besieges		
He is diligent in reformation	727		Samaria	724	
<i>Sennacherib</i> , son of <i>Salmaneser</i> , invades			Samaria is taken, the ten tribes are car-		
Judah	713	715	ried into captivity, the kingdom of		
<i>Hezekiah's</i> sickness	713		Israel is extinguished, while that of		
The ambassadors from Babylon . . .	712		Judah is permitted to remain for a		
<i>Sennacherib</i> besieges Jerusalem. The			hundred and thirty years longer . .	721	719
assyrian army destroyed	710	712			
<i>Manasseh</i> succeeds his father	698	696			
<i>Amon</i> succeeds his father	643	641			
<i>Josiah</i> succeeds his father	641	639			
<i>Jehoahaz</i> succeeds his father	610	608			
<i>Jehoiakim</i> succeeds his brother	610	608			
<i>Jehoiachin</i> succeeds his father	599	597			
<i>Zedekiah</i> succeeds his nephew	599	597			
Jerusalem destroyed by <i>Nebuchadnezzar</i>	588	586			

The preceding table may assist the reader in understanding the connexion between the history of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, and enable him to keep in view the leading events which occurred in each, at about the same periods. It also brings before us the confusion which existed in Israel, after the worship of the Lord, agreeably to his word, had been departed from. The first column of dates is according to *Usher*, which is generally adopted; the second is according to the suggestions of *Hales*, who has recently applied with much industry to investigating the scripture chronology. The apparent difficulties in the dates of this history are of no importance to the general reader, but it is well to show that they do not afford any just ground for cavil. These difficulties appear chiefly to have arisen from not observing the duration of the interregnums in the succession of the latter kings; also that the reigns are computed in the method usual in the east, that is, in current time, reckoning the part of a year in each reign as a complete year.

THE BOOK OF EZRA.

The history of this book is the accomplishment of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the return of the jews out of Babylon, at the end of seventy years. It was penned by Ezra, whose name it bears, but he did not arrive at Jerusalem till above eighty years after the first return of the jews. From its contents we especially learn that every good work must meet with opposition from enemies, and be injured by the misconduct of friends; but that God will make his cause to prevail, notwithstanding all obstacles and adversaries.

In the remainder of the Old Testament history we behold the chosen people of God restored from captivity, and the re-establishment of their church and state, according to the predictions of several prophets. But we do not now find them an independent people, but a small remnant, returned under the protection of a foreign power, and struggling with many enemies. They were, however, completely cured of idolatry, though lamentably prone to disobedience in other respects.

The restoration of the jews was an event of the highest consequence, tending to preserve religion in the world, and preparing the way for the appearance of the great Deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are thereby also furnished with a decisive proof of the Divine inspiration of the prophets, whose predictions clearly show that the events took place by the Divine appointment,—and the prophecies of Zechariah and Haggai especially should be compared with this book, as they harmonize together.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1—4. *The proclamation of Cyrus for the rebuilding of the temple.*

CYRUS was employed as the instrument of the jews' deliverance, for which he gave orders as soon as he was master of the kingdom of Babylon. We are told whence this proclamation took its rise. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus. The hearts of kings are in the hand of the Lord, and, like the rivulets of water, he turneth them which way soever he will. God governs the world by his influence on the spirits of men; whatever good is done, God stirs up their spirits to do it. He puts thoughts into the mind, gives to the understanding to form a right judgment, and directs the will which way he pleases. Whatever good offices are done for the church of God, he must have the glory of them.

In reading the scripture history, we have frequent occasion to remark that men have always been inclined to oppose and corrupt the religion which God has revealed, while the establishment and revival of it most evidently proceed from him. What thanks and praise we owe to Him who has thus graciously interposed to plant or restore his truth!—(60.)

As Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius the mede and Cyrus the persian, Dan. 6. 28, there can be little doubt but that he was instrumental in procuring this proclamation. The prophecies of Isaiah, in which Cyrus was mentioned by name, and of Jeremiah, which foretold the duration of the captivity, seem to have convinced that monarch that Jehovah,

the God of Israel, was the true God, that the captive jews were his chosen people, and Jerusalem the place where he was especially to be worshipped.

It was during the captivity of the jews, and their consequent dispersion among the inhabitants of the most illustrious empire in the civilized world, that God principally employed them as the means of exciting the attention of the heathen to his majesty and providence.—(26.)

The publication proclaimed liberty to the captives. Cyrus professed that he made it in gratitude to God for the favours bestowed upon him. God is the Fountain of power; the kingdoms of the earth are at his disposal: and those whom God has intrusted with power and possessions, are obliged thereby to do much for his cause. He gave free leave to all the jews in his dominions to go up to Jerusalem, and to build the temple of the Lord there. Some persons of true piety were so situated, that they did not think it their duty to remove, as Daniel; others would be hindered by infirmities, or the peculiar circumstances of their families. Even the spiritual advantages would appear to be more for posterity than for that generation; thus to engage in it would require strong faith, lively hope, and active zeal.

Cyrus furnished such things as they needed. He took it for granted that those among them of ability would offer their free-will offering for the house of God, to promote the rebuilding of it. But beside that, he would have them supplied out of his kingdom. Well-wishers to the temple should be well-doers for it.

1. Cyrus was the son of Cambyses king of Persia. He conquered the assyrians, as foretold by the prophet Isaiah more than a hundred years before his birth, and was the founder of the persian monarchy. The term of seventy years limited for the duration of the captivity had now expired. The three first verses of this chapter are the same as the conclusion of the last of Chronicles.

2. The God of heaven is the same in sense as the Lord God of hosts, the latter expression is used in the scriptures written before the captivity, the former in those written subsequently.

Ver. 5—11. *The people provide for their return*
—*The vessels of the temple restored.*

Cyrus having given leave, many of the jews went up to Jerusalem. The leaders herein were the chief of the fathers. The priests and levites were, as became them, with the first that set their faces again toward Zion. If any good work is to be done, let ministers lead. Those who accompanied them, were such as God had inclined to go up. The same God that raised up the spirit of Cyrus to proclaim this liberty, raised up their spirits to take the benefit; it was done, not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts, Zech. 4. 6. The temptation was strong to some to stay in Babylon; they had settlements there, the discouragements of their return were many and great, their own land was to them a strange land. Jerusalem was in ruins, surrounded by enemies, to whom they would be an easy prey. Many were wrought on to stay in Babylon; but some feared not to return, and they were those whose spirits God raised. He, by his Spirit and grace, filled them with gracious affection to their own land, and desire for the free and public exercise of their religion. Had God left them to themselves, they had staid in Babylon; but he put it into their hearts to set their faces Zionward, and, as strangers, to ask the way thither, Jer. 50. 5; for they, being a new generation, went out, like their father Abraham, from this land of the chaldees, not knowing whither they went, Heb. 11. 8. Whatever good we do, is owing to the grace of God. Our spirits naturally incline to this earth and the things of it; if they move upward in any good affections or good actions, it is God that raises them.

The call and offer of the gospel are like Cyrus's proclamation; deliverance is preached to the captives, Luke 4. 18. Those that are bound under the dominion of sin, may be made free by Jesus Christ. Whosoever will, by repentance and faith, return to God, his duty to God, and his happiness in God, Jesus Christ has opened

the way for him, and lets him go up out of the slavery of sin into the glorious liberty of the children of God. The offer is general to all; Christ makes it, in pursuance of the grant the Father has made him of all power both in heaven and in earth, and of the charge given him to set up a church in the world, a kingdom among men. Many that hear this joyful sound, choose to sit still in Babylon, are in love with their sins, and will not venture upon the difficulties of a holy life; but some break through the discouragements, whatever it cost them; they are those whose spirit God has raised above the world and the flesh, whom he has made willing in the day of his power, Psa. 110. 3. Thus will the heavenly Canaan be replenished, though many perish in Babylon; and the gospel offer will not have been made in vain.

As the tabernacle was made from the spoils of Egypt, and the first temple built by the labours of the strangers, so the second was built by the contributions of chaldeans; all intimating the admission of the gentiles into the church, in due time. God can, when he pleases, incline the hearts of strangers to be kind to his people, and make those strengthen their hands, who before weakened them. Cyrus himself, to give proof of the sincerity of his affection to the house of God, restored the vessels of the temple. They were now forthcoming. Such care God has of the living vessels of mercy, vessels of honour, of whom it is said, The Lord knows them that are his, 2 Tim. 2. 19, 20, and they shall none of them perish. Though they had been put into an idol's temple, and used in the service of idols, yet they were given back, to be used for God. God will recover his own.

The restoration of the jews from captivity, evidently represents the redemption of sinners by Jesus Christ. One excuse or another would keep every one from accepting his salvation, did not God's preventing grace raise up the spirits of some, to accept with thankfulness what all else refuse. They who prefer carnal things to the eternal blessings God confers on all who sincerely apply for them, will find that pride and love of sin aggravate, and do not excuse the guilt of unbelief. If we by grace have been enabled to receive salvation, and to bring forth the fruits of it, while we take the comfort, we shall give God the glory; and fervently

pray that others may also be made willing in the day of his power.

8. Judah had a prince, even while in captivity. Sheshbazzar, supposed to be the same with Zerubbabel, is here called prince of Judah; the chaldeans called him Sheshbazzar, which signifies joy in tribulation; but among his own people he went by the name of Zerubbabel, a stranger in Babylon; so he looked upon himself, and that Jerusalem was his home. He took care of the affairs of the jews, and had some authority over them, he being of the house of David.—*Henry.*

But he was only a provincial governor, Hag. 1. 1, a mere vassal of the king of Persia, in whom the sovereignty rested; therefore he could not be considered as sitting on the throne of David, and ruling in Judah. See Jer. 36. 30.—*Townsend.*

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1—35. *The numbers that returned.*

An account was kept in writing of the families that came up out of captivity, and the numbers of each family. They are called children of the province. Judah, that had been an illustrious kingdom, to which other kingdoms had been made provinces, was now itself made a province to the kingdom of Persia. See how sin diminishes and debases a nation, which righteousness would exalt! Some little difference there is between the numbers of some of the families here, and in Neh. 7, where this catalogue is repeated; which might arise from this, that some who had given in their names afterward drew back; others, that declined at first, afterward repented, and went, and so increased the number. Some of these families are named from persons that were their ancestors, others from places in which they had formerly resided.

Ver. 36—63. *The numbers of the priests, levites, and retainers to the temple.*

The priests were a considerable number, about a tenth part of the whole. The levites, taking in both the singers and the porters, did not make 350. Time was when the levites were more forward in their duty than the priests, 2 Chron. 29. 34; but they were not so now. There were a considerable number who presumed they were of the seed of Jacob, but could not produce their pedigrees, and yet would go up to Jerusalem, having an affection to the house and people of God. These shamed those who were true-born israelites, and yet were not called israelites indeed. Some of the family of the priests having intermarried with the descendants of Barzillai, and having disregarded their priestly character, were unable to trace their genealogy. They were

excluded by the tirshatha, or governor, (Zerubbabel, Neh. 8, 9,) till a high priest should arise with Urim and Thummim, who might, by immediate revelation from God, decide upon their case. But such a high priest was not vouchsafed under the second temple. They that undervalue their relation to the Lord in times of reproach, persecution, or distress, will have no benefit from it when it becomes honourable or profitable. Those who have no evidence that they are by regeneration spiritual priests unto God, through Jesus Christ, have no right to the comforts and privileges of christians.

Ver. 64—70. *The whole number of the people—Their offerings for the temple.*

The general number, both in Ezra and Nehemiah, is more than the particulars. Only the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi, are reckoned by their families in both these places; the rest, being of the other tribes, are reckoned in the gross sum. This solves the difficulty which appears between the general numbers and the particulars.—(57.)

They came to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem; that house, that holy and beautiful house, was now in ruins. They offered freely toward the setting of it up in its place. It seems that was the first house they talked of setting up. Though beginning the world, as it were, yet they offered, and offered freely, toward building of the temple. Let none complain of the necessary expenses of their religion. They that seek first the kingdom of God, his favour, and his glory, will have all other things added unto them. Their offerings were nothing in comparison with the offerings of the princes in David's time; yet, being according to their ability, were as acceptable to God. Though their cities were out of repair, yet, because they were such as God had assigned them, they were content to dwell in them, and were thankful for liberty and property, though they had little of pomp, plenty, or power. Here was room enough for them all, and for all their substance; there was no strife among them, but harmony; a blessed presage of their settlement, as their discords, in the latter times of that state, were of their ruin. Thus the Lord will carry us through all undertakings entered on according to his will, with an aim to his glory, and in dependence on his assistance. Those who, at the sound

of the gospel, renounce sin and return to the Lord, shall be guarded and guided through all perils of the way, and arrive safely at the mansions provided for them in the holy city of God.

64. One thousand seven hundred and sixty-five persons are mentioned by Nehemiah, who are not in Ezra, and Ezra has 494 who are not in Nehemiah; these differences, which at first seem to increase the difficulty of the passage, afford a point by which it may be cleared. If we add Ezra's *surplus* to the *sum* in Nehemiah, and Nehemiah's *surplus* to the *number* in Ezra, both amount to 31,583; this taken from the total, which is the same in both, leaves 10,777 belonging to the other israelitish tribes.—*Greenfield, from Alting.*

—Many of the differences between this chapter and Neh. 7. arise from errors and variations of transcribers, several of which have been removed by the collation of manuscripts since the english translation was made. In other places the greek version assists to explain the hebrew.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1—7. *The altar and sacrifices—The festivals kept.*

It is supposed that the jews began their journey towards their own land early in the spring; this would occupy three or four months. They took a short time to provide for their families, and then all met together in the seventh month. This was the season of the first solemnities after their arrival. They observed with devotion the feast of trumpets, the great day of atonement, and the feast of tabernacles. Jeshua and his brethren the priests, Zerubbabel and his brethren the princes, built the altar of the God of Israel. Let us learn hence, 1. To begin with God. The more difficult and necessitous our case, the more concerned we are to have him with us in all our ways. If we expect to be directed by God's oracles, let him be honoured by our offerings. 2. To do what we can in the worship of God, when we cannot do what we would. They could not immediately have a temple, but they would not be without an altar. Abraham, wherever he came, built an altar; and, wherever we come, though we may, perhaps, want the benefit of the candlestick of preaching, and the shew-bread of the eucharist; yet, if we bring not the sacrifices of prayer and praise, we are wanting in our duty, for we have an altar that sanctifies the gift ever ready. A reason is here given, why they hastened to set up the altar. Fear was upon them, because of the people of the land; they were in the midst of enemies. And

though they were so, yet they built the altar, so some read it; they would not be frightened from their religion by opposition. Never let the fear of man bring us into this snare. Or, *because* they were so, therefore they set up the altar. Apprehension of danger should stir us to our duty. Have we many enemies? Then it is good to have God our Friend, and to keep up correspondence with him. Our fears should drive us to our knees.

The sacrifices for all these solemnities were a heavy expense for so poor a company; yet besides those expressly appointed, many offered free-will offerings to the Lord. And they made preparation for the building of the temple immediately. While we do what we can, we must still be aiming to do more and better. Tyre and Sidon, as of old, furnish them with workmen, and Lebanon with timber, orders for both they had from Cyrus; what God calls us to, we may depend upon his providence to furnish us with.

Ver. 8—13. *The mixture of joy and sorrow with which the foundations of the temple were laid.*

God was praised at the laying of the foundation of the temple, by the singing of that hymn which will never be out of date; God is good, and his mercy endureth for ever. Let all the streams of mercy be traced up to the fountain. Whatever our condition is, how many soever our griefs and fears, let it be owned that God is good; and whatever fails, that his mercy fails not. Let this be sung with application, as here. Not only his mercy endures for ever, but it endures for ever toward Israel; Israel, when captives in a strange land, and strangers in their own land. However it be, yet God is good to Israel, Psa. 73. 1, good to us. Let the reviving of the church, when it seemed dead, be ascribed to the continuance of God's mercy for ever; for therefore the church continues.

There was a remarkable mixture of various affections upon this occasion. There were different sentiments among the people of God; each expressed himself according to his sentiments, and yet there was no disagreement among them; their minds were not alienated, nor was the common concern retarded by it. 1. Those that only knew the misery of having no temple at all, praised the Lord with shouts of joy. To them, even this foundation seemed great, and was as life from the dead; to their hungry souls

even this was sweet. We ought to be thankful for the beginnings of mercy, though it be not yet come to perfection; and the foundations of a temple, after long desolations, cannot but be fountains of joy to every faithful israelite. 2. Those who remembered the glory of the first temple, and considered how far inferior this was likely to be, wept with a loud voice. There was reason for it, and if they turned their tears into the right channel, and bewailed the sin that was the cause of this melancholy change, they did well. Sin sullies the glory of any church or people, and when they find themselves diminished and brought low, that must bear the blame. Yet it was their infirmity to mingle those tears with the common joys, and so to cast a damp upon them. They despised the day of small things, and were unthankful for the good they enjoyed, because it was not so much as their ancestors had, though it was much more than they deserved. It was an aggravation of the discouragements they hereby gave to the people, that they were priests and levites, who should have taught others not to let the remembrance of former afflictions drown the sense of present mercies.

This mixture of sorrow and joy is a representation of this world; some are bathing in rivers of joy, while others are drowned in floods of tears. In heaven all are singing, and none sighing; in hell all are weeping and wailing, none rejoicing; but on earth we can scarcely discern the shouts of joy from the noise of weeping. Let us learn to rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep; to rejoice as though we rejoiced not, and to weep as though we wept not. The Lord's goodness, and the consideration of our own unworthiness, should make us thankful at every token of his favour. May Jesus deliver us from the wrath to come, and prepare us for his glorious and eternal happiness, that where he is, there we may be also.

Psalm 107. also Psa. 87. 111. 112. 113. 114. 116. 117. 127. 128. 134. are considered by many commentators as having been written upon the release from the babylonish captivity, and at the building and dedication of the second temple.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1—5. *The adversaries hinder the building of the temple.*

Every attempt to revive true religion will excite the opposition of Satan, and of

the children of disobedience in whom he worketh. The adversaries were the euthians, or samaritans, who had been planted in the land of Israel, 2 Kings 17. They were chiefly influenced by the enmity the seed of the serpent bears to the true church of God, arising from hatred to the holiness displayed in his law, ordinances, truths, and people. They were neither israelites by birth, nor true proselytes; the law of God forbade all coalition with such persons, nor were they included in the decree of Cyrus. It was plain that they did not mean to unite cordially in the worship of the Lord alone, according to his written word; therefore mischief must result from their being admitted. When this plot failed, they did what they could to discourage the work. Those that were cool and indifferent, were by these artifices drawn off. Also, they hired counsellors against them. Wonder not at the restlessness of the church's enemies in their attempts against building God's temple. Satan, whom they serve, and whose work they are doing, is unwearied in walking to and fro through the earth to do mischief. And let those who discourage a good work, and weaken the hands of them that are employed in it, see whose pattern they follow.

4. *Graves* has shown the manner in which the opposition of the samaritans was overruled for the benefit of the true church. Their hostility to the jews made each party more anxious to preserve the sacred text pure.

Ver. 6—24. *The decree of Artaxerxes—The building of the temple is hindered.*

The passage, ver. 6—23, is an historical anticipation, introduced as a parenthesis into the account of the first opposition of the samaritans to rebuilding the temple, from the time of Cyrus to Darius Hystaspes; describing their subsequent opposition to rebuilding Jerusalem and its walls in the ensuing reigns of Xerxes and Artaxerxes. Ver. 24 takes up the subject of ver. 5 again, and the fifth chapter proceeds to the account of rebuilding the temple, on the exhortation of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.—(35.)

The rulers of the samaritans wrote a letter to Artaxerxes, which Ezra seems to have copied from the records of Persia, therefore it stands in the original in the chaldee or assyrian language. They urge him to stop the building of the temple, which they say would be to the kings' dishonour more than any thing else.

Secret enmity to Christ and his gospel is often gilded over with pretended affection to Cesar and his power. But if they that lived upon the crown, thought themselves bound in gratitude thus to support the interest of it, much more reason have we thus to be concerned for God's honour. We have our maintenance from the God of heaven, live upon his bounty, and are the care of his providence; therefore it is not meet for us to see his name dishonoured, without doing what we can to prevent it. They represent the jews as disloyal, and dangerous to the government. Thus was Elijah most unjustly charged with troubling Israel, the apostles with turning the world upside down, and Christ himself with perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cesar; and we must not think it strange if the same plan be still pursued. It is an old slander that the prosperity of the church would be injurious to kings and princes. But nothing can be more false, for true godliness teaches us to honour and obey the king; only where the command of God requires one thing and the law of the land another, we must obey God rather than man, and patiently submit to the consequences. All who love the gospel should therefore walk circumspectly, avoiding all appearance of evil; for the adversaries of the church take advantage of every such occasion. The world is ever ready to believe any accusation against the people of God, and refuses to listen to their explanations. Every line in this letter breathes the subtilty and malice of the old serpent.

The king suffered himself to be imposed upon by these frauds and falsehoods. Princes must see and hear with other men's eyes and ears, and give judgment upon things as represented to them, which things are often represented falsely. God's judgment is always just, because he sees things as they are, and it is according to truth. The work of the house of God ceased for a time, through the power and insolence of its enemies, and stood still through the coldness and indifferency of its friends. Though a stop was put to it by the violence of the samaritans, yet the jews might have gone on by connivance, if they had been influenced by due affection to the work, as appears by their being reproved by the prophets for not doing it, ch. 5. 1, compared with Haggai 1. 1.

6, 7. This Ahasuerus was not the monarch mentioned in the book of Esther.

8. The letters, decrees, &c. from this place to ch. 7. 27, in the original are not in hebrew, but chaldee, in which language they were written.

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1, 2. *The leaders of the people, invited by prophets, forward the building of the temple.*

The interval between the destruction of the first and the foundation of the second temple was fifty-one years. But after the death of Daniel, probably in the third year of Cyrus, soon after his last vision, the adversaries of the jews, the samaritan colonists, obstructed the building, and by their interest at the persian court, got an order to stop the work during the remainder of the days of Cyrus, who was absent in foreign wars, or not at leisure to attend to his provinces. The work was discontinued, in consequence of their successful opposition, during the ensuing reign of Cambyses, and till the second year of Darius Hystaspes. The work was then resumed, chiefly by the exhortations of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Zerubbabel the governor and Jeshua the high priest applied to the persian court, and obtained a renewal of the original decree of Cyrus for rebuilding the temple; which they set about with alacrity, so that the work was begun in the second year of Darius, and finished in the sixth, nineteen years after its commencement, Zech. 8. 9; Hag. 2. 18. They then celebrated the dedication of the temple.—(35.)

The building of the temple was suspended about fifteen years. They had two good ministers, who earnestly persuaded them to recommence the work. It is a sign that God has mercy in store for a people, when he raises up prophets to be helpers in the way and work of God, guides, overseers, and rulers. Zerubbabel the chief prince, and Jeshua the chief priest, were active and forward in this work. In the first chapter of Haggai we see what great things God does by his word, which he magnifies above all his name, and by his Spirit working with it.

Ver. 3—17. *Letter of Tatnai against the jews.*

See the care which the Divine providence took of this good work. The eye of their God was upon the elders of the jews, who were active in the work, so that their enemies could not cause them to cease, as they would have done, till the matter came to Darius. They desired they would cease till they had instruc-

tions from the king. But they would not so much as yield them that, for the eye of God was upon them, even their God; and that baffled their enemies, and protected the builders from their malicious designs. While employed in God's work, we are under his special protection; his eye is upon us for good. This should keep us to our duty, and encourage us therein when difficulties are ever so discouraging.

We may observe how fully the elders of the jews gave the samaritans an account of their proceedings. Let us learn hence, with meekness and fear, to give a reason of the hope that is in us, 1 Pet. 3. 15, rightly to understand, and then readily to declare, what we do in God's service, and why we do it. And while in this world, we always shall have to confess that our sins have provoked the wrath of God. All our sufferings spring from thence, and all our comforts from his unmerited mercy.

The samaritans represented this fairly to the king. They called the temple at Jerusalem the house of the great God. The samaritans owned the God of Israel to be the great God that is above all gods. They tell what they have to say for themselves, and leave it to the king to give directions as he should think fit. God's people could not be persecuted if they were not belied. Some men who have no true religion, possess equity, candour, and generosity: these qualities entitle them to our respect, though they will not justify them in the sight of God. Those religious peculiarities which some deem novel or singular, are ancient beyond all other sentiments or observances, and have been maintained by the wisest and most excellent men. Let but the cause of God and truth be fairly stated and fairly heard, and it will keep its ground.

This chapter shows the opposition the people of God receive from false friends as well as open enemies. They that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution. If Christ Jesus be the foundation stone, it is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to all carnal characters. But let grace be sought to go on with the building, and to be more and more established in the faith, praying in the Holy Spirit. Look daily to the foundation, even Christ Jesus, for other foundation can no man lay. On him rests the whole weight and burden of salvation, let him

bear all the glory. And, as stones highly polished, let one grace be added to another, in nothing being terrified by your adversaries, but living upon, walking with, rejoicing in the Lord Jesus Christ. However the work may seem to be hindered, yet the Lord Jesus Christ is carrying it on, his people are growing unto a holy temple in the Lord, for a habitation of God through the Spirit.—(37.)

CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1—12. *The decree for completing the temple.*

The decree of Cyrus for the building of the temple is here repeated. Providence so ordered, that it came to light; and it is here inserted; also the confirmation of it by a decree of Darius, by which he forbade his officers to do any thing in opposition to the building of the temple. Thus was the wrath of the enemy made to praise God, and the remainder thereof did he restrain. And he orders them to assist out of his own revenue. He was sensible he needed their prayers, and might receive benefit by them; and was therefore kind to them. Let not the greatest princes despise the prayers of the meanest saints; it is desirable to have them for us, and dreadful to have them against us. He enforces his decree with a penalty; and entails a curse upon all those kings and people that should ever have any hand in the destruction of this house. When God's time is come for accomplishing his gracious purposes concerning his church, he will raise up instruments to do it, from whom such good service was not expected. And what is intended for the prejudice of the church, has often, by the overruling providence of God, been made serviceable to it, Phil. 1. 12. The enemies of the jews, in appealing to Darius, hoped to get an order to suppress them, but, instead of that, they got an order to supply them.

While our thoughts are directed to this event, we are led by Zechariah to fix our regard on a nobler, a spiritual building. He sets before us the true Zerubbabel, the Builder of his church, even the Lord Jesus Christ, Zech. 6. 13. This structure rises under His care, even in our own day, for he continues to lay one stone upon another: lend your assistance towards furthering the great design. There are many adversaries; difficulties of various

sorts prevent the progress of this sacred edifice. Yet let not the severest opposition discourage you, for in due season it will be completed to his abundant praise. He shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it, Zech. 4. 7.—(60.)

Ver. 13—22. *The temple is finished—The feast of the dedication and of the passover kept.*

What the king ordered, they did; the building of the temple was finished. The gospel church, that spiritual temple, is long in the building, but it will be finished at last, when the mystical body is completed. Every believer is a living temple, building up himself in his most holy faith; much opposition is given to this work by Satan and our own corruptions; we trifle, and proceed in it with many stops and pauses; but He that has begun the good work, will see it performed. Spirits of just men will be made perfect.

When the temple was built, being designed only for sacred uses, they showed by an example how it should be used, which is the proper sense of the word *dedicate*. The sacrifices offered for burnt-offerings and peace-offerings were not to be compared, in number, with what had been offered at the dedication of Solomon's temple, but, being according to their present ability, were accepted. These hundreds were more to them, than Solomon's thousands were to him. They offered twelve he-goats for sin-offerings, one for every tribe, to make atonement for their sins, which they looked upon as necessary, in order to the acceptance of their services. Thus, by getting iniquity taken away, they would free themselves from the sting of their late troubles, which, if not removed, would be a worm at the root of their present comforts. This service was performed with joy. Let us welcome holy ordinances with joy, and let us serve the Lord with gladness. Whatever we dedicate to God, let it be done with joy that he will please to accept of it. Though the temple service could not be performed with pomp and plenty as formerly, yet perhaps it was performed with as much purity and close adherence to the Divine institution, which was the true glory of it. No beauty like the beauty of holiness.

Now that they were newly delivered out of their bondage in Babylon, it was seasonable to commemorate their de-

liverance out of their bondage in Egypt—to celebrate the passover. Fresh mercies should put us in mind of former mercies. Notice is here taken of the purity of the priests and levites. In Hezekiah's time, they were many of them under blame for not purifying themselves. The purity of ministers adds much to the beauty of their ministration; so does their unity. See how the proselytes, the converts, are described; they separate themselves from the filthiness of sin, and fellowship with sinners, join themselves to the Israel of God, and set themselves to seek the God of Israel; and those that do so in sincerity, though strangers and foreigners, are welcome to eat of the gospel feast, as fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.

It was now about twenty years since the foundation of this temple was laid, and the old men who then wept at the remembrance of the first temple, were most of them dead; now there were no tears mingled with their joys. Those that are, upon good grounds, joyful, have reason to be thankful, *because* it is God that makes them to rejoice. He is the Fountain whence all the streams of our joy flow. God has promised to all who take hold of his covenant, that he will make them joyful in his house of prayer. The particular occasion they had for joy at this time, was, that God had turned the heart of the emperor to strengthen their hands. If those that have been, or, we feared, would have been against us, prove to be for us, we may rejoice in it as a token for good, that our ways please the Lord: he must have the glory of it. And when sinners are redeemed from the bondage of Satan, separated from their wicked practices, and humbled; when they seek the Lord, depending by faith on the atonement of the Redeemer, observing his ordinances and commandments, they are children of the captivity who shall be made joyful by the Lord himself.

Justin Martyr, in his conference with Trypho the Jew, quotes an address of Ezra before the celebration of the passover, in which he expounds the mystery of that ordinance as clearly relating to Christ. Justin concludes it was expunged from the Hebrew copies by the Jews at an early period, as manifestly favouring Christianity. The passage Whitaker supposes to have stood between the verses 20 and 21 of this chapter; it may be thus translated: "And Ezra said unto the people, This passover is our Saviour and our Refuge, and if ye shall understand and ponder it in your

heart, that we are about to humble HIM in this sign, and afterwards shall believe on HIM, then this place shall not be made desolate for ever, saith the Lord of hosts. But if ye will not believe on HIM, nor hear HIS preaching, ye shall be a laughing-stock to the gentiles." As this passage is not known to have existed in the hebrew, and is not to be found in any copies of the septuagint, most biblical writers suppose that it originally crept into some greek bibles from a marginal addition by an early christian, rather than that it was expunged by the jews. Some, however, believe it to be authentic, but refer it to the solemnity recorded in the last chapter of Ezra.—See *T. H. Horne, Grabe, A. Clarke, Magee, Greenfield.*

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1—10. *Ezra goes up to Jerusalem.*

Ezra was one of the sons of Aaron, a priest, and God chose him to be an instrument of good to Israel. He was a man of great learning; a ready scribe in the law of Moses; very conversant with the scriptures, especially the writings of Moses; and well acquainted with the sense and meaning of them. Gospel ministers are called scribes instructed to the kingdom of heaven, Matt. 13. 52; New Testament scribes. It was a pity that such a name should be given, as in the degenerate ages of the jewish church, to men who were enemies to Christ and his gospel, learned in the letter of the law, but strangers to the spirit of it. But Ezra was a man of great piety and holy zeal. He sought the law of the Lord, that is, he made it his business to search the scriptures; and sought the knowledge of God, and his mind and will, in the scriptures, which is to be found there, but not without seeking. He made conscience of doing according to it. This use we must make of our knowledge of the scriptures; for happy are we, if we do what we know of the will of God. He set himself to teach Israel the statutes and judgments of that law. What he knew he was willing to communicate for the good of others; for the ministration of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. But observe; Ezra first learned, and then taught. He practised the commandments himself, and then directed others in the practice of them; thus his example confirmed his doctrine. He prepared his heart to do all this; or, he fixed his heart. He took pains in his studies, and then resolved to persevere in them. Thus he became a ready scribe.

Ezra went from Babylon to Jerusalem, for the good of his country. The king was kind to him; he granted all his requests,

whatever he desired to put him into a capacity to serve his country. When he went, many more went with him; he obtained favour from his king, by the good hand of the Lord that was upon him. Every creature is that to us, which God makes it to be, and from him our judgment proceeds. We must see the hand of God in the events that occur, and acknowledge him with thankfulness, when we have reason to call it his good hand.

Ver. 11—26. *The commission to Ezra by Artaxerxes.*

The commission of Artaxerxes to Ezra, giving him authority to act for the good of the jews, was very ample. He made Ezra governor of all the jews in their own land. The liberality of heathen kings to support the worship of God, reproached the conduct of many kings of Judah, and will rise up in judgment against the avarice of many wealthy, professed christians, who will not part with their superfluous treasures to promote the cause of God. Unconverted men may perceive that whatever is commanded of God, should be diligently done; and that neglect of his worship will bring wrath upon kingdoms and princes. But faith, working by love and gratitude, is alone capable of producing unreserved obedience to all God's commands. The wisdom God communicates through his word, is peculiarly useful to magistrates, that they may be a terror to evil-doers, and a protection to them that do well. But the weapons of christian ministers are not carnal. Faithful preaching, holy lives, fervent prayers, and patient suffering when called to it, are the means to be used to bring men into obedience to Jesus Christ.

14. We find, from history, that seven princes of Persia having slain the usurper Smerdis, the persian kings afterwards had seven counsellors who possessed great privileges, and had authority in all public transactions.

Ver. 27, 28. *Ezra blesses God for his favour.*

Ezra cannot proceed, without inserting this thankful acknowledgment of the goodness of God to him and his people. We must, in every thing, give thanks; whatever occurrences please us, we must own God's hand in them, and praise his name. Two things Ezra blessed God for: 1. For his commission. Blessed be God that put such a thing into the king's heart. God can put things into men's hearts, which would not arise there of themselves. If any good appear in our own hearts, or in the hearts of others, we must own it

was God that put it there, and bless him ; it is he that worketh in us both to will and to do that which is good. 2. For the encouragement he had to act in pursuance of his commission. He has extended mercy to me. The king, we may suppose, had regard to Ezra's merits, but he ascribes it wholly to God's mercy that recommended him to the favour of his prince. Ezra was a man of courage, yet he attributed this not to his own heart, but to God's hand ; I was strengthened to undertake the services, as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me, to direct and support me. If God gives us his hand, we are bold and cheerful ; if he withdraw it, we are weak as water. Whatever service we are enabled to do for God and our generation, God must have all the glory of it. Strength for it is derived from him, and therefore the praise of it must be given to him.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ver. 1—20. *The companions of Ezra.*

Ezra, having received his commission from the king, assembles the outcasts of Israel, and the dispersed of Judah. God on this occasion raised up the spirits of a small remnant to accompany him. Upon the first day of the first month, Ezra took a view of them, and found there none of the sons of Levi. When he observed that he had no levites in his retinue, he was much at a loss. Eleven men, chief men, and men of understanding, he chose to be employed for the filling up this vacancy. Ezra sent them to a place, where there was a college of levites, the place Casiphia, and they brought about forty levites to attend him. By this it appears that they were not averse to go, but wanted to be excited. What a pity it is that good men should omit a good work, merely for want of being spoken to ! Of the nethinims, the servitors of the temple ministers, 220 enlisted. Thus, says Ezra, were we furnished with levites, by the good hand of our God upon us. If where ministers have been wanting, the vacancies are well supplied, let God have the glory, and his good hand be acknowledged as qualifying them for the service, inclining them to it, and then opening a door of opportunity for them.

15. Ahava was a river of Assyria in the province of Adiabene, supposed to have been the country of Ava, 2 Kings 17. 24 ; 18. 34 ; 19. 13.

17. Probably the country near the Caspian sea.

20. The nethinims mentioned here and ch. 2. 58. are supposed to have been the descendants of the gibeonites and of the canaanites whom Solomon reduced to servitude.

Ver. 21—23. *Ezra implores God's blessing.*

Ezra procured levites to go with him ; but what will that avail, unless he have God with him ? In all our ways, we must acknowledge God, and in those particularly wherein we endeavour to serve the interest of his kingdom among men ; Ezra does so here. Observe what principles he went upon—That those who seek God, are safe under the shadow of his wings, even in their greatest dangers ; but that those who forsake him, are continually exposed, even when most secure. Ezra being afraid lest the king should not understand the difference between using means, and confiding in them, determined to travel without any guard, except that of the Almighty, being unwilling to ask any other, after his avowed confidence in his God. To put the whole company solemnly and publicly under his protection, Ezra proclaimed a fast. Thus humbling themselves for their sins, and seeking forgiveness, they besought the Lord to be their Guard and Guide. No doubt, he had himself begged of God direction in this affair, from the first ; but, for public mercies, public prayers must be made, that all who are to share in the comfort, may join in the request for it. When entering upon any new condition of life, our care should be to bring none of the guilt of the sins of our former condition into it. When we are in any imminent peril, let us be at peace with God, and then nothing can do us any real hurt. They were strangers in the road, were to march through their enemies' countries, and had not a pillar of cloud and fire to lead them, as their fathers had ; but they believed that the power and favour of God would be to them instead. All our concerns about ourselves, our families, and our estates, it is our wisdom and duty by prayer to commit to God, and leave the care of them with him, Phil. 4. 6.

On some occasions we should omit those precautions for safety, or those provisions for our families which in themselves are lawful, lest we should cause others to stumble, and so our God be dishonoured. It is better to renounce every personal consideration, than prejudice those that are without, or mislead those within the church of God. Let us ask wisdom of God that we may know how to

use or to refuse lawful things. We shall be no losers by venturing, suffering, or renouncing, for the Lord's sake. Their prayers were answered, and the event declared it; never any that sought God in earnest, sought him in vain. In times of difficulty and danger, a season appropriated to secret or social fasting and prayer, is the best method for relief we can take. Few good and lawful enterprises fail of success, when begun and conducted in this way.

Ver. 24—30. *Treasures committed to the priests.*

Having prayed to God to preserve all the substance they had with them, Ezra shows himself especially solicitous for that part of it which belonged to the house of God, and was an offering to Him. Do we expect that God should, by his providence, keep that which belongs to us? let us, by his grace, keep that which belongs to him. Let God's honour and interest be our care; and then we may expect that our lives and comforts will be his.

Observe the exactness with which Ezra lodged this trust. In all trusts, but especially sacred ones, we ought to be punctual. Those intrusted with holy things, as all stewards of the mysteries of God, are concerned to remember that they must shortly give a particular account, that they may be faithful, and so give up their account with joy. When St. Paul charges Timothy with the gospel treasure, he bids him keep it until the appearing of Jesus Christ, and his own appearing before Him to give account of his trust, when his faithfulness would be his crown.

Ver. 31—36. *Ezra arrives at Jerusalem.*

Enemies laid wait for the jews, but God protected them. Even the common perils of journeys oblige us to sanctify our going out with prayer, and our returns in peace with praise and thanksgiving; much more ought God to be thus looked to in what appears to be a dangerous expedition. They were brought in safety to their journey's end. Let those who have stedfastly set their faces toward the New Jerusalem, proceed and persevere to the end, till they appear before God in Zion, and they shall find that he who has begun the good work, will perform it. If preservation in earthly journeys demand our grateful praises, what shall we render when the Lord hath conducted us safely through the perilous and wear-

some pilgrimage of life, through the gloomy vale of death, out of the reach of all our enemies, into the regions of eternal happiness!

Ezra's treasurers were faithful; when come to Jerusalem, they were impatient to be discharged of their trust. It is a great ease to the mind, and a great honour, to make it appear that a trust has been faithfully discharged. A clear conscience and upright conduct are comfortable and reputable, but our whole dependence for the acceptance of our persons and our services, must be rested on the merits and sufferings of our great Surety. Through Him we must devote ourselves and our services to our reconciled God, and walk in his commandments and ordinances as we have ability. When our ways please the Lord, he makes even our enemies to be at peace with us.

As soon as they came to the altar, they offered sacrifice. Among their sacrifices they had a sin-offering; for it is the atonement that sweetens and secures every mercy to us, which will not be truly comfortable, unless iniquity be taken away, and our peace made with God. The number of their offerings answered to the number of their tribes. Thus the union of the two kingdoms was intimated, according to what was foretold, Ezek. 37. 22. All the twelve tribes met by their representatives at the same altar. Even the enemies of the jews became their friends; instead of hindering the people of God, they furthered them, in complaisance to the king. Then had the church rest.

The expressions here used, direct our attention to the deliverance of sinners from spiritual bondage, and their pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem, under the care and protection of their God and Saviour. Those who have been long enslaved to sin and Satan, are exhorted to go forth from their captivity, and to enter on this pilgrimage. Difficulties and dangers await them, but the Lord will be with them by the way, as their Leader and Commander. Under his defence, whatever opposition may be raised, the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head. O for the Spirit of God to be poured out in a more abundant measure, that men of piety and zeal, like Ezra, may stand forth as leaders in the church, to call sinners out of their captivity, and to go before them in the way to Zion!—(60.)

CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 1—4. *Ezra mourns for the marriages of the jews with strange wives.*

Many corruptions lurk out of the view of the most vigilant rulers: here is a damp upon Ezra's joy. Many of the people, even some of the rulers, had married wives out of heathen families, and joined themselves in affinity with strangers. Herein, they disobeyed the express command of God, which forbade all intimacy with the heathen, particularly marriages, Deut. 7. 3. They distrusted the power of God, and acted with carnal policy, hoping to strengthen themselves by these alliances. A practical disbelief of God's all-sufficiency is at the bottom of the sorry shifts we make to help ourselves. They exposed themselves and their children to the peril of idolatry; the very sin, and introduced by this very way, that had once been the ruin of their church and nation. To promote marriages between the professed people of God and ungodly persons, in all ages has been a successful device of Satan to produce apostasy and impiety. Carnal professors may make light of such intimacies, and try to explain away the exhortations to be separate; but those who are best acquainted with the word of God, and have the most affectionate regard for the souls of men, will treat the subject in another manner. They cannot but forebode the worst consequences from such unions. The evils excused, and even pleaded for, by many professors, excite astonishment and regret in the true believer.

The persons guilty of this sin were not only some unthinking people that knew no better, but many priests and levites, whose office it was to teach the law, and this law among the rest. Miserable is the case of that people, whose leaders cause them to err. Information was given to Ezra. Those who cannot themselves reform public abuses, may do good service by informing those who can. Ezra expressed the deep sense he had of the dishonour hereby done to God. The sins of others should be our sorrow, and the injury done by them to God's honour, and the souls of men, we should lay to heart. Sorrow for sin must be great sorrow; such was Ezra's. We have reason to be astonished at the scandalous sins of professors. We may stand amazed to see men contradict, prejudice, and ruin themselves. Strange that men should act so inconsiderately, and so inconsist-

ently! Upright men are astonished at it. Ezra's grief for this had an influence upon others. It is the character of believers, that they tremble at God's word; they stand in awe of its precepts, and its threatenings, and to those who do so will God look, Isa. 66. 2. They that tremble at the word of God, cannot but tremble at the sins of men, by which the law of God is broken, and his wrath and curse incurred. The pious zeal of one against sin, may provoke very many to the like, as the apostle speaks, 2 Cor. 9. 2. Many will follow in a good work, who have not consideration, conduct, and courage enough to lead. All who profess to be God's people ought to own those that appear and act against vice and profaneness, and do what they can to strengthen their hands.

Ver. 5—15. *Ezra's confession of sins.*

Observe the time when Ezra made this address. The sacrifice, especially the evening sacrifice, was a type of the great propitiation, that blessed Lamb of God, who, in the evening of the world, was to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself; to which we may suppose Ezra had respect in this penitential address to God. He makes confession, with his hand, as it were, upon the head of that great Sacrifice, through which we receive the atonement. He shook off the burden of his grief, so far as was necessary to the lifting up of his heart to God. He put himself into the posture of a petitioner suing for mercy; thus representing the people for whom he was now an intercessor. The address itself is not properly to be called a prayer, for there is not a word of petition in it; but if we give prayer its full latitude, it is the offering up of pious and devout affections to God; and very devout, very pious are the affections which Ezra here expresses. His address is a penitent confession of sin, the sin of his people, from a gracious concern for the honour of God, and the welfare of Israel.

Observe the confession Ezra makes of the sin, and the aggravations of it, to affect his own heart, and theirs that joined with him, with holy sorrow and shame and fear, in the consideration of it, that they might be deeply humbled for it. The great and sore judgments which God had brought upon the jews for their sins, very much aggravated their conduct. The late mercies God had bestowed did likewise very much aggravate their sins.

This Ezra insists largely upon. He owns their sins to have been very great; Our iniquities are increased over our heads; we are ready to perish in them as in deep waters. But let this be the comfort of true penitents, that though their sins reach to the heavens, God's mercy is in the heavens, Psa. 36. 5. Their sin had been long persisted in; national guilt accumulates from age to age, and often when we think little of our sins, they are ready to bring down upon us Divine vengeance. Even the preached gospel, and the ordinances of God, which are a nail in his holy place, on which to suspend all our hopes and interests, will aggravate the doom of those who rest in outward observances, and go on in their sins.

By a nail in his holy place, Ezra means a prince of their own nation and religion, such being compared to nails and pins, Isa. 22. 23, or some kind of settlement, they having been tossed and removed from one place to another.—(54.)

It was a great aggravation of their sin, that it was against an express command. And that in the judgments by which they had already smarted, God had punished them less than their iniquities deserved. What! has God dealt so gently with us in correcting us, and shall we abuse his favour, and turn his grace into wantonness?

Observe also the devout affections working in Ezra, in making this confession. Speaking of sin, he speaks as one much ashamed. Sin is a shameful thing; as soon as our first parents had sinned, they were ashamed of themselves. Holy shame is as necessary in true and ingenuous repentance as holy sorrow. Looking to God as our God, will be of great use in the exercise of repentance. Ezra speaks as much amazed. The discoveries of guilt excite amazement; the more we think of sin, the worse it looks. The difficulty excites amazement; how shall we seek peace with God? Shall we say, We have not sinned? or, God will not require it? If we do, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Shall we say, Have patience with us, and we will pay thee all? God will not thus be mocked. Shall we say, There is no hope, and let come on us what will? That is to make bad worse. What shall we say? Say, I have sinned; I have done foolishly; God be merciful to me a sinner, Hos. 14. 2.

Ezra speaks as one much afraid. There is not a surer or sadder presage of ruin,

than revolting to sin, to the same sins again, after great judgments, and great deliverances. Every individual in the whole church of God has cause to wonder that he has not wearied out the Lord's patience, and brought destruction upon himself. What then must be the case of the ungodly? But though the true penitent hath nothing to plead in his own behalf, the heavenly Advocate pleads most powerfully for him. He prevails for all who condemn themselves, and cast themselves wholly upon the Lord's mercy to sinners, through his atoning blood. He speaks as one assured of the righteousness of God, resolved to acquiesce in that, and to leave the matter with him, whose judgment is according to truth. Thou art righteous, wise, just, and good; thou wilt neither do us wrong, nor be hard upon us; behold, we are before thee, we lie at thy feet, waiting our doom; we cannot stand before thee, insisting upon any righteousness of our own. We have no plea to support us, or bring us off; therefore we fall down before thee, in our trespass, and cast ourselves on thy mercy; do unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee, Judg. 10. 15. We have nothing to say, nothing to do, but to make supplication to our Judge, Job 9. 15. Ezra knew not what to ask; he could say nothing to excuse the people; he dreaded the consequences, but had not given up all hope. He closed his address without adding one petition, assured that the righteous Lord would do what was right; he referred all to him.

8. "A nail in his holy place," margin, "a constant and sure abode." The pins or nails in eastern houses are fixed very securely. They are pieces of iron built in the walls when the house is constructed.—See *Harmer*.

9. The term here translated "wall," signifies "the fence of a shepherd's fold," here figuratively taken for their establishment again in their own land.—*Hales*.

CHAPTER X.

Ver. 1—5. *Shechaniah encourages Ezra to make reformation.*

Good impressions were made upon the people by Ezra's humiliation and confession of sin. See what a happy influence the good examples of great ones may have upon inferiors. When Ezra, a scribe, a scholar, a man in authority, so deeply lamented the public corruptions, they concluded that they were very grievous. Shechaniah, one of Ezra's companions from Babylon, owned the national guilt; the matter is too plain to be denied, and

too bad to be excused. It does not appear that Shechaniah was himself culpable, but his father was guilty, and divers of his father's house, as appears, ver. 26. He encouraged himself and others to hope that though the matter was bad, it might be amended; Yet now there is hope in Israel: where else should there be hope, but in Israel? Those who are strangers to that commonwealth, are said to have no hope, Eph. 2. 12. The case is sad, but it is not desperate; the disease threatening, but not incurable. There is hope that the people may be reformed, the guilty reclaimed; the judgments the sin deserves may be prevented, and all will be well. Now that the people begin to lament, a spirit of repentance seems to be poured out; now there is hope that God will forgive, and have mercy. The sin that truly troubles us, shall not ruin us. 1. In melancholy times we must observe what makes for us, as well as what makes against us. 2. There may be good hopes through grace, even when there is the sense of great guilt before God. 3. Where sin is seen and lamented, and good steps taken towards a reformation, even sinners ought to be encouraged.

Ezra advises that a speedy and effectual course should be taken for divorcing the strange wives. The case is plain; what has been done amiss, must be undone again as far as possible; nothing less than that is true repentance. To us now it is certain that sin must be put away, with a resolution never to have any thing more to do with it, though it be dear as the wife of thy bosom, nay, as a right eye, or a right hand; otherwise there is no pardon, no peace. What has been unjustly got, cannot be justly kept, but must be restored. As to the case of being unequally yoked with unbelievers, such marriages, it is certain, are sinful, and ought not to be made, but now they are not null. The partition-wall between jews and gentiles now is broken down. Our rule under the gospel is, If a brother has a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away, 1 Cor. 7. 12, 13. He shows them not only that it must be done, but how. Let Ezra preside in this matter, and let all resolve to stand by him in it. Arise, be of good courage. Weeping, in this case, is good, but reforming is better. See what God said to Joshua in a like case, Josh. 7. 10, 11.

Ver. 6—14. *Ezra assembles the people, who, at his exhortation, promise amendment.*

Ezra sent orders to all the children of the captivity to attend at Jerusalem within three days, he was authorized by the king to enforce his orders. Within the time limited, most of the people met at Jerusalem. The periodical rains of that season were abundant, and added to their distress on this occasion, as there was no building large enough to contain the multitude. The people submitted to Ezra's determination in this matter. There is then hope concerning people, when they are convinced, not only that it is good to part with their sins, but that it is indispensably necessary; we must do it, or we are undone. There is danger lest those who are greatly affected with the view of their sins should be swallowed up by over-much sorrow, and discouraged from present duty. The grounds of hope are to be pointed out to them; so rich is the mercy, and so plenteous the redemption of God, that there is hope for the vilest who hear the gospel, and are willing to accept of free salvation. When sinners mourn for their sins, and tremble at the commands of God, there is hope that they will forsake them. To affect others with godly sorrow or love to God, we must ourselves be affected: earnest feeling in these important concerns is more impressive than eloquence or reasoning.

It was agreed how this affair should be carried on. The persons in fault were many, and it would require time to discover and examine them. Peculiar cases could not be adjudged without deliberation. The most effectual divorce from beloved sins will generally be preceded by examination, for that which is hastily resolved seldom proves lasting.

Ver. 15—44. *The reformation of the strange marriages effected.*

They began, the first day of the tenth month, to examine the matter. If we may judge by other cases, provided the wife were proselyted to the jewish religion, she was not to be put away; the trial of which would require great care. The names of the persons found guilty of this crime are here recorded to their perpetual reproach; many of the priests were found guilty. They that should have taught others the law, brake it themselves, and by their example imboldened others to do likewise. But they gave an

example of repentance, and they took the appointed way of obtaining pardon, Lev. 6. 6, owning their guilt, the desert of it, and humbly suing for forgiveness. Yet we meet with this grievance again, Neh. 13. 23, and Mal. 2. 11, for such corruptions are easily brought in, but not without great difficulty purged out again. The best reformers can but do their endeavour, but when the Redeemer himself shall come to Zion, he shall effectually turn away ungodliness from Jacob. And when sin is repented of and forsaken, God will mercifully forgive; but the blood of Christ, our Sin-offering, is the only atonement which takes away the guilt. No apparent repentance or amendment will benefit those who reject this propitiation, for self-dependence proves them still unhumbled. All the names written in the book of life, are those of penitent, believing sinners, not of self-righteous who think they have no need of repentance.

Ezra continued at Jerusalem. He exercised authority for nearly twelve years. We read of him in the next book employed in his sacred duties, though superseded by Nehemiah in his civil authority. It is recorded that with the assistance

of others, also versed in the sacred writings, he collected all the books of which the holy scriptures then consisted, disposed them in their proper order, and settled the canon of scripture; changing the names of some places which had become obsolete; correcting errors which had crept in through the negligence of copyists; adding also, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, whatever was necessary for illustrating or correcting them, transcribing the whole in the chaldee character. Thus he published a correct edition of the Old Testament, which was subsequently copied and followed with much care, and from hence the copies now extant were taken. As Ezra was himself a writer of the sacred scriptures, we may be sure that he was guided in his work by the Holy Spirit. He is said to have lived to the age of one hundred and twenty. Malachi, Nehemiah, Esther, and some passages in other books, must have been added subsequently to his time, probably by a succession of pious and learned men who continued to pay attention to the canon of scripture, till about the time of Simon the just, who was made high priest about twenty-five years after the death of Alexander the Great, which took place B. C. 323. After that period nothing was added to the canon or sacred books of the Old Testament, but even in literal points the greatest vigilance has been exercised by the jews to preserve them unaltered. Some however are of opinion that the whole canon was collected by Ezra himself, excepting a few additional names and notes. This accords with the uniform tradition of the jews. A valuable and particular account of the proceedings of Ezra respecting the scriptures is given by *Prideaux*.

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH.

The book of Nehemiah is sometimes called the second book of Ezra, or Esdras, from an opinion of some of the ancient fathers that Ezra was the author of it. But there can be no reasonable doubt that Nehemiah, whose name it bears, and who was cup-bearer to Artaxerxes Longimanus, was the author. He arrived at Jerusalem thirteen years after Ezra, with the rank of governor of the province, with full power and authority to encourage the rebuilding of the walls, and to promote the welfare of his countrymen. His administration lasted about thirty-six years. The scripture history closes with the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah's concern in the advancing of the settlement of Israel we have a full account of in this book, wherein he also records the workings of his heart, in the management of public affairs; inserting in the history many devout reflections and ejaculations, which discover deep feelings of serious piety, and are peculiar to his writings.

CHAPTER I.

Nehemiah's distress for the misery of Jerusalem—His prayer.

NEHEMIAH was in Shushan, the palace, or royal city of the king of Persia; he was the king's cup-bearer. When God has work to do, he will never want instruments to do it with. Nehemiah lived at ease, and in honour, but cannot forget that he is an israelite, nor shake off the thoughts of his brethren in distress. He was ready to do them all the good offices he could, and, that he might know which way to do them a kindness, made inquiries concerning them. We should inquire

especially concerning the state of the church and religion, and how it fares with the people of God; not that, like the athenians, we may have something to talk of, but that we may know how to direct our prayers and praises.

A melancholy account of the present state of the jews and Jerusalem was given to him. Every Jerusalem on this side the heavenly one will have some defect, for making up of which it will require the help and service of its friends. Nehemiah was greatly afflicted when he heard the evil tidings. His first application was to God, that he might have the

fuller confidence in his application to the king. In his prayer he had respect to the greatness of God, his terrors to his enemies, his mercies to his people, and covenant relation to them. Even the terrors of the Lord may be improved for the comfort and encouragement of those who trust in him. He confessed that the people and himself and his father's house were sinners, and had given the Lord just cause to leave them in the hands of their adversaries. In the confession of sin, let this be owned, that it is setting up the corruptions of our own hearts in opposition to the commands of God. Yet he expressed confidence in his mercies. The israelites alone professed to be servants of the God of heaven. God had forewarned them that if they transgressed they should be scattered, but if they returned to him, he would gather them again to their own land. If God were not more mindful of his promises than we are of his precepts, we were undone. Our best pleas in prayer are taken from the promise of God, the word on which he has caused us to hope.

When worldly men would solicit any favour from the great, they seek to obtain the interest of all that have influence with them; but the children of God must seek to their Father, who is able to secure them the assistance of all the kings on the earth. Favour with men is comfortable, when we can see it springing from the mercy of God. Other means must be used, but the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth most.

Our intercourse with God will best prepare us for our dealings with men. When we have commended a concern to God, the mind is set at liberty, and feels satisfaction and composure. In unison with this is the admonition of the apostle, Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. When we have thus addressed ourselves to God, difficulties vanish. We know that if the affair be hurtful, he can easily hinder it; and if it be good for us, he can as easily forward it.—(42.)

None so love or serve God as to be entitled to favour by the covenant of works. If by his grace we are true believers, still we have done evil, so that he is righteous in our sufferings, and merciful in our comforts. We must still come before him

as sinners, pleading his gracious promises. May he grant us a spirit of simple, humble dependence on his mercy and grace, with zeal for his glory, and affection for his people; and may he stir up many others, humbly and zealously to serve his cause in the spirit of faith and prayer, and a heavenly mind, with devotedness to him.

11. The greek version is, To the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thine own children.

"Cup-bearer." The king's butler, which gave him the opportunity of being frequently with the king; and, to be in such a place of trust, he must be in the king's confidence. No eastern potentate would have a cup-bearer to whom he would not trust his life, poison being frequently administered in this way.—*A. Clarke.*

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1—8. *Nehemiah's request to the king.*

When Nehemiah had prayed for the relief of his countrymen, he set himself to consider what he could do towards it. Our prayers must be seconded with our serious endeavours, else we mock God. Near four months passed, from Chisleu to Nisan, (from November to March,) before Nehemiah made his application; probably it was so long before his month of waiting came, and there was no coming into the king's presence uncalled, *Esth. 4. 2.* We are not thus limited to certain moments in our addresses to the King of kings, but have liberty of access to him at all times; to the throne of grace we never come unseasonably.

Good men should, by their cheerfulness, convince the world that wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and thus of the pleasantness of religious ways; but there is a time for all things, *Eccl. 3. 1.* Nehemiah now saw cause both to be sad, and to appear so. Many are melancholy and sad, but can give no good reason for it. But conscious guilt, the sense of God's displeasure, the afflictions of his people, and the decays of religion, are causes of sorrow to the children of God, under which no earthly delights can comfort them.

These arbitrary monarchs were suspicious. The cup-bearer's melancholy countenance attracted the king's notice. Upon his urgent inquiry, Nehemiah seems to have feared lest the king should impute it to some criminal design. Had such a suspicion been formed, it might have been instantly fatal. He assigns the ruins of Jerusalem as the true cause of his grief. The grievances of the church, but especially its desolations, are matter of grief

to all that have concern for God's honour, that are living members of Christ's mystical body, and are of a public spirit; they favour even Zion's dust, Psa. 102. 14. All nations, even those that had not expectation of the resurrection of the dead, have looked upon the sepulchres of their ancestors as in some degree sacred, and not to be violated.

Nehemiah, in his supplication to the king, does not speak of Jerusalem as the city of the God of Israel, but as the place of his fathers' sepulchres. The king could understand the interest his cup-bearer must take in the place of his fathers' sepulchres; but he knew nothing of the delight which good men take in the habitation of God's house, the place where his honour dwelleth.—(46.)

The king encouraged Nehemiah to tell his mind. This gave him boldness to speak; much more may the invitation Christ has given us to pray, and the promise that we shall speed, encourage us to come boldly to the throne of grace. Nehemiah immediately prayed to God, that he would give him wisdom to ask properly, and incline the king's heart to grant him his request. They that would find favour with kings, must secure the favour of the King of kings. He prayed to the God of heaven, as infinitely above even this mighty monarch. It was a secret, sudden ejaculation; he lifted up his heart to that God who understands the language of the heart. It is good to be much in pious ejaculations, especially upon particular occasions. Wherever we are, we have a way open heaven-ward; this will hinder no business, but further it rather; therefore let no business hinder this, but rather give rise to it. Nehemiah had prayed very solemnly with reference to this very occasion; yet when it comes to the point, he prays again. Ejaculations and solemn prayers must each have their place. Nor should we ever engage in any pursuit in which it would be improper thus to seek and expect the Divine direction, assistance, and blessing.

The king intimated that he would spare Nehemiah a while, and let him have what clauses he pleased inserted in his commission. Here was an immediate answer to his prayer; for the seed of Jacob never sought the God of Jacob in vain. He takes notice, 1. Of the presence of the queen; she sat by. Perhaps this was queen Esther, who seconded Nehemiah's

request. 2. Of the power and grace of God. He gained his point, not according to his merit, his interest, or his good management, but according to the good hand of his God upon him. Gracious souls take notice of God's hand, his good hand, in all events which turn in favour of them; this is the Lord's doing, and therefore doubly acceptable.

Ver. 9—18. *Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem—He views the ruined state of the walls, and incites the jews to rebuild them.*

Ezra went as a priest and scribe, though with civil authority; in consistency with his character and professions, he would not require a guard. Nehemiah went to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and to defend the jews against their enemies; his having a guard was suitable to his design. Nehemiah used every precaution to prevent the adversaries of the jews from discovering his intentions to rebuild the walls, till the work was actually begun. The moonlight enabled him to make his observations. This account shows the ruinous and defenceless state of the city, nearly a hundred years after the return of the jews from captivity; and Nehemiah's personal survey enabled him to meet objections or misrepresentations.

When he discovered his design to the rulers and people, they cheerfully concurred. He did not tell them, at first, what he came about. But when he had viewed and considered the matter, he told them what God had put into his heart, even to build up the wall of Jerusalem. He does not undertake to do it without them; it could not be the work of one man; nor does he command, but exhorts and excites them to join with him in this work. To encourage them, he speaks of the design as owing its origin to the special grace of God; and its progress hitherto to the special providence of God. They are ashamed that they have sat still so long without attempting this needful work, and now resolve to bestir themselves. Many a good work would find hands enough to be laid to it, if there were but one good head to lead in it. They all saw the desolations of Jerusalem, yet none proposed the repair of them. But when Nehemiah proposed it, they all consented. It is a pity that a good motion should be lost, for want of one to move it. By stirring up ourselves and one another to that which is good, we strengthen ourselves and one another for

it. The great reason why we are weak in our duty, is, because we are cold to it, indifferent and unresolved.

Ver. 19, 20. *The opposition of the adversaries.*

Sanballat and Tobiah were determined enemies to the Jewish nation; when they saw a man come who professedly sought the welfare of the children of Israel, they were vexed to the heart. The enmity of the serpent's seed against the cause of Christ is confined to no age or nation. They set themselves to hinder Nehemiah, but in vain. See here with what little reason the enemies tried to discourage them. See also with what good reason they slighted these discouragements. They were the servants of the God of heaven, the only true and living God; they were acting for him in what they did, therefore he would bear them out, and prosper them, though the heathen raged, Psa. 2. 1. The menaces of the church's enemies may be easily despised by the church's friends. God will prosper his people, and clear their character from aspersions as well as deliver them from affliction; but wretched are they who have no portion or right in the new Jerusalem, the city of our God.

The application to ourselves is plain. The church of God asks for our help. Is not this holy city desolate, and exposed to various assaults? Does the consideration of its low estate cause you any grief? Let not inferior concerns, business, pleasures, or the support of a party, engage your attention, so that Zion and her welfare is nothing to you.—(60.)

CHAPTER III.

The rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

The work was divided, so that every one might know what he had to do, and mind it with a holy desire to excel, yet without contention, or separate interest. No strife appears among them, but which should do most for the public good. Eliashib the high priest, with his brethren the priests, were first in this troop of builders. Ministers should be first and foremost in every good work; their office obliges them to teach and quicken by their example, as well as by their doctrine. If there be labour in it, who so fit as they to work? If danger, who so fit as they to venture? The priests repaired the sheep-gate, so called, because through it the sacrifices were brought.

Many were active in this work, who were not inhabitants of Jerusalem, and therefore consulted purely the public welfare, not private interests of their own. Every Israelite should lend a hand toward the building up of Jerusalem. Several rulers, both of Jerusalem and of other cities, were active, thinking themselves bound to do their utmost for this good work. But here is a just reproach on the nobles of Tekoa, they would not come under obligation to this service; as if their rank were their discharge from serving God and doing good, which are indeed the highest honour and the truest freedom. Let not nobles think any thing below them, by which they may advance the interests of their country; for what else is nobility good for, but that it has a higher and larger sphere of usefulness, than that in which inferior persons move?

Some females helped forward the work—Shallum and his daughters. St. Paul speaks of some good women that laboured with him in the gospel, Phil. 4. 3. Some repaired over against their houses, and one repaired over against his chamber. When a general good work is to be done, each should apply himself to that part which is within his reach. If every one will sweep before his own door, the street will be clean; if every one will mend one, we shall all be mended. Let all who lament the triumph of iniquity, and the desolations of piety, endeavour to do what they can, by their prayers, example, education of their children, and good conversation, to promote the cause they have espoused. Of one it is said, that he earnestly repaired that which fell to his share, ver. 20; not that others were cold or indifferent, but he was the most vigorous of any of them, and made himself remarkable for it. It is good to be thus zealously affected in a good thing; and it is probable that this good man's zeal provoked many to take the more pains. Some that had first done helped their fellows.

The walls of Jerusalem in heaps of rubbish, faintly represent the desperate state of the world around us, while the number and malice of those who hindered the building scarcely give us an idea of the enemies we have to contend with, while executing the work of God. Every one must begin at home and work before his own door, ch. 3. 10, 23, 28, 30, for it

is by getting the work of God advanced in our own souls we shall best contribute to the good of the church. Let us then all be of one heart and of one mind in relation to this great matter. The work of God advances more rapidly in the souls of men when they strengthen and encourage each other; and whoever works for the good of others will find he is profited by his own exertions.—(61.)

Nehemiah himself, though he undertook not any particular piece of the wall, yet did more than any, for he had the oversight of all. Half his servants worked where there was most need, and the other half stood as sentinels, as we find, ch. 14. 16; while he directed and encouraged the builders, and kept a watchful eye upon the motions of the enemy. May the Lord thus stir up the hearts of his people of every denomination, to lay aside their petty disputes, and disregard their worldly interests, in comparison of building the walls of Jerusalem, and defending the cause of truth and godliness against the assaults of avowed enemies.

1. They builded the sheep-gate, they laid its beams, and set up the doors of it.—*Boothroyd.*

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1—6. *Opposition of Sanballat and others.*

Sanballat speaks with scorn of the workmen. Tobiah speaks with no less scorn of the work itself. Profane scoffers sharpen one another. Many a good work has been thus looked upon with contempt by the proud and haughty scorers. For the labours of those who would promote the gospel, will excite the enmity of such as are haters of God; and thus the wisest and most excellent behaviour will be derided as madness and folly. The most sacred things may be represented so as to excite profane derision. Such contempt is hard to bear, but sometimes it proves the christian's protection, and gives him leisure to proceed with his designs. They who disagree in almost every thing will unite in persecution; the same enmity which dictates contempt, will suggest violent and cruel measures.

Nehemiah did not answer these fools according to their folly, but looked up to God by prayer. He begs God to notice the indignities done to them. God's people have often been a despised people, but he hears all the slights that are put upon them, and it is their comfort that he does so. He begs of God to turn the

reproach upon the enemies themselves; this was spoken rather by a spirit of prophecy than of prayer; and is not to be imitated by us who are taught of Christ to pray for them that despitefully use and persecute us. Christ himself prayed for those that reproached him, Father, forgive them. As impenitent despisers reject the atonement, their sins cannot be covered. Nehemiah had reason to think that the hearts of those sinners were desperately hardened, else he would not have prayed that their sins might never be blotted out. The reason he gives is, They have provoked thee. We should be angry at the malice of persecutors, not because it is abusive to us, but because it is offensive to God; on that we may ground an expectation that God will appear against it, Psa. 74. 18, 22. The builders, notwithstanding these reflections, made good speed, for the people had a mind to work. Their hearts were upon it. Good work goes on well, when people have a mind to it. The reproaches of enemies should quicken us to our duty, not drive us from it.

Ver. 7—15. *The designs of the adversaries.*

What quarrel had these men with the jews? Had they done them any wrong? Or did they design them any? No, they lived peaceably by them; it was merely out of envy and malice; they hated the jews' piety, and were therefore vexed at their prosperity, and sought their ruin. Observe how unanimous they were in opposition to the work of God. They took crafty counsel, and promised themselves success from the secrecy of their management. The hindering good work is what bad men aim at and promise themselves success in opposing; but good work is God's work, and it shall prosper. At the time when the adversaries said, Let us cause the work to cease; Judah said, We are not able to go forward with it. Active leading men many times have as much difficulty from fears of their friends, as from terrors of their enemies.

Information was brought to Nehemiah of the enemy's designs. There were jews that dwelt by them who gave intelligence of it. God has many ways of bringing to light, and so bringing to nought the devices and designs of his church's enemies. If our enemies cannot fright us from duty or deceive us into sin, they cannot hurt us. Nehemiah put himself and his cause under the Divine protection. That was

the way of this good man, and should be our way. All his cares, all his griefs, all his fears, he spread before God, and thereby made himself easy. Before he used any means, he made his prayer to God, for with him we must always begin. Having prayed, he set a watch against the enemy. The instructions Christ has given for our spiritual warfare, agree with this, Watch, and pray, Matt. 26. 41. If we think to secure ourselves by prayer, without watchfulness, we are slothful, and tempt God. If by watchfulness, without prayer, we are proud, and slight God; either way, we forfeit his protection.

Nehemiah posted the guards, animated and encouraged them. What are our enemies in comparison with God; especially in opposition to him? He is great above them to control them, and will be terrible when he comes to reckon with them. Those that by faith see the church's God to be great and terrible, will see the church's enemies to be mean and despicable. The reigning fear of God is the best antidote against the insnaring fear of man. He reminds them for whom they fight; All that are dear to you in this world: therefore behave valiantly. This disappointed the enemy. The jews returned every one to his work with the more cheerfulness, because they saw that God owned it. God's care of our safety should engage and encourage us to go on with vigour in our duty. As soon as a danger is over, let us return to our work, and trust God another time.

Ver. 16—23. *Nehemiah's precautions.*

The builders were not so secure as to lay down their arms. Thus must we watch always against our spiritual enemies, and not expect that our warfare will be accomplished till our work is ended. While one half was at work, the other half was under arms. Dividing their time between the trowels and the spears, they are said to work with one hand, and to hold their weapons with the other. Thus must we work out our salvation with the weapons of our warfare in our hand; for in every duty we must expect to meet with opposition from our spiritual enemies, against whom we must still be fighting the good fight of faith. Every builder had a sword, which he could carry without hindering his labour. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit, which we ought to have always at hand, and never have to seek for it, both in our labours, and in our

conflicts, as christians. Every true christian is both a labourer and a soldier, working with one hand, and fighting with the other.

Care was taken to give an alarm upon the first intimation of danger. When workmen, it was requisite they should be dispersed wherever there was work to do; but when soldiers, it was requisite they should be found in a body. Thus should the labourers in Christ's building be ready to unite against a common foe. The inhabitants of the villages were ordered to be ready to help. Nehemiah himself, and all his men, kept close to their business. Thus ought we to be always upon our guard against our spiritual enemies, not only, as here, while it is light, but when it is dark, for they are the rulers of the darkness of this world. It was a sign that their heart was upon their work, when they were at all times ready for service. Good work is likely to go on successfully, when those who labour in it, thus make a business of it. And Satan fears to assault the vigilant christian; or, if we are attacked, our God fights for us. Thus must we wait to the close of life, never putting off our armour till our work and warfare be ended; then we shall be welcomed to the rest and joy of our Lord.

23. The sense of the last words is very uncertain. The syriac reads, "for a full month," or about half the time occupied in the work. *A. Clarke* thinks the reading of one of the hebrew manuscripts as follows, is most likely to be correct; "We did not lay aside our garments, but in order to send them to the washing."

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1—5. *The jews complain of grievances.*

In the midst of the depredations to which the jews were exposed, and their attention to self-defence, tillage was neglected, and scarcity ensued. Those who had money took advantage of such as were in low circumstances, with large families, and obliged to raise money to pay their tribute. At length they were reduced to the necessity of selling even their sons and daughters into slavery. Thus do men prey upon their own species: by despising the poor they reproach their Maker, and aggravate instead of relieving the distresses which are always entitled to compassion, when not the effect of extravagance or sloth. Such conduct is a disgrace to any, but who can express sufficient abhorrence of it when adopted by professing christians?

The persons they dealt with were hard. They exacted interest at twelve per cent., the hundredth part every month. If men borrow sums to trade with, to increase their stocks, or to purchase land, there is no reason why the lender should not share with the borrower in his profit. Or if to spend upon their lusts, or to repair what they have so spent, why should they not pay for their extravagances? But if the poor borrow, to keep their families in distress, and we are able, we ought either to lend freely, or to give freely towards it. With compassion for the oppressed, we would lament the hardships which many in the world are groaning under; putting our souls into their souls' stead, and remembering in our prayers and succours them that are burdened, as burdened with them. But let those who show no mercy, expect judgment without mercy.

Ver. 6—13. *Nehemiah rebukes the usurers, and redresses the grievances.*

Nehemiah did not put off the hearing of this matter till he had more leisure. He applied himself immediately to the consideration of it, knowing that, let him build Jerusalem's walls ever so high, so thick, or so strong, the city could not be safe while such abuses were tolerated. He reasoned with the rich jews, and showed the evil of what they did. The regular way of reforming men's lives, is to endeavour, in the first place, to convince their consciences. If you walk in the fear of God, you will not be either covetous of worldly gain or cruel toward your brethren. They that walk in the fear of God will not dare to do a wicked thing, Job 31. 13, 14, 23. All that profess religion should be very careful that they do nothing to expose themselves to the reproach of those that are without, lest religion be wounded through them. Nothing exposes religion more to reproach than the worldliness and hard-heartedness of the professors of it. They that rigorously insist upon their right, with a very ill grace try to persuade others to recede from theirs.

See how earnestly, yet humbly, Nehemiah persuades them; though he had authority to command, yet, for love's sake, he rather beseeches. See how particularly he presses them to be kind to the poor. He laid them under all the obligations possible to do what he pressed them to. In expostulating with selfish people, it is good to contrast their conduct with that

of others who are liberal and benevolent; but it is best to point to His example, who though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich, 2 Cor. 8. 9. When this is compared with their conduct, who care not how many they reduce to beggary to enrich themselves, the contrast between the Master and his professed disciples is a striking argument, unanswerable upon any scriptural principles.

The people praised the Lord; so far were they from promising with regret, that they promised with all possible expressions of joy and thankfulness. Thus David, when he took God's vows upon him, sang and gave praise, Psal. 56. 12. They did according to this promise. Good promises are good things, but good performances are all in all.

Ver. 14—19. *Nehemiah's forbearance.*

This passage must have been added some years after the date of the transaction just recorded. Nehemiah had mentioned his own practice, as an inducement to the nobles not to burden the poor, even with just demands; here he relates his practice more particularly, as an inducement both to his successors, and to the inferior magistrates, to be tender of the people's ease. He had not done as the former governors did, because of the fear of God; that restrained him from oppressing the people. Those who truly fear God, will not dare to do any thing cruel or unjust. In our demands, we must consider, not only the justice of them, but the ability of those on whom we make them. He gave much which he might have withheld. Let those in public places remember that they were preferred to do good, not to enrich themselves. He mentions it to God in prayer, not as if he had thereby merited any favour from God as a debt; but to show that he looked not for any recompence of his generosity from men, but depended upon God only to make up to him what he had lost and laid out for his honour; and he reckoned the favour of God reward enough. If God do but think upon me for good, I have enough. His thoughts to us-ward are our happiness, Psal. 40. 5. He refers himself to God, to recompense him in such a manner as he pleased; If men forget me, let my God think on me, and I desire no more.

We must not do our good works to be seen of men, and it is seldom expedient

to speak of them ourselves; yet we should let our light shine before men that they may see our good works, and glorify God. Sometimes a good man may be called upon to declare his upright conduct and the motives of it, as an example to others. Nehemiah evidently spake and acted as one that knew himself to be a sinner. He did not mean to claim a reward as of debt, but in the manner that the Lord rewards a cup of cold water given to a disciple for his sake. The fear and love of God occupying the heart, and true love of the brethren, will influence to every good work as God hath given ability. Such are proper evidences of justifying faith; and our reconciled God will look upon such persons for good, according to all they have done for his people.

CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1—9. *Sanballat's plot to hinder Nehemiah.*

Sanballat and his companions, not daring openly to attack the jews, formed a scheme to draw Nehemiah from his work, and to slay him. But their importunity neither induced him to yield, nor to have any words about their malicious intentions. His care was, that the work might not cease. He says nothing of his jealousies, nor reproaches them for treacherous designs, but gives a good reason, and one of the true reasons, why he would not come. Let those who are tempted to idle merry meetings by their vain companions, thus answer the temptation, We have work to do, and must not neglect it. Four times they attacked him with the same solicitation, and he returned the same answer. We must never suffer ourselves to be overcome, by the greatest importunity, to do any thing sinful or imprudent; but when attacked with the same temptation, must resist it with the same reason and resolution.

When baffled in this design, they formed a more dangerous plan. Sanballat endeavours to possess Nehemiah with an apprehension, that his undertaking to build the walls of Jerusalem was generally represented as aiming to make himself king, and to shake off the persian yoke. It is common for that which is the sense only of the malicious, to be falsely represented by them as the sense of the many. Sanballat pretends to inform Nehemiah as a friend, hoping by this means to take him off from his business. This is written to him in an open letter, that

the contents, being known to the people, might excite them to forsake the work. But Nehemiah was aware at what they aimed, therefore not only denied that such things were true, but that they were reported; he was better known than to be thus suspected. We must never omit any known duty for fear it should be misconstrued; but, while we keep a good conscience, let us trust God with our good name. In fact it was not thus reported. God's people, though loaded with reproach, are not really fallen so low in reputation as some would have them thought to be.

In the midst of his complaint of their malice, Nehemiah lifted up his heart to Heaven in a short prayer. It is the great support of true believers, that in all straits and difficulties they have a good God to go to, from whom, by faith and prayer, they may have grace to silence their fears, and strengthen their hands, when their enemies are endeavouring to fill them with fears. When, in our christian work and warfare, we enter upon any particular service or conflict, this is a good prayer for us—I have such a duty to do, such a temptation to grapple with; now, therefore, O God, strengthen my hands. Some read it as a holy resolution. The words, O God, are supplied in our translation; as if he had said, Now therefore I will strengthen my hands. Christian fortitude will be sharpened by opposition. Every temptation to draw us *from* duty should quicken us the more *to* duty.

5. Letters in the east are very carefully folded and put into bags. To send an open letter to a person of Nehemiah's rank was a gross insult.

7. The meaning of the word prophecy, in the scriptures, is not always confined to the foretelling of future events. It sometimes signifies to preach and interpret scripture, and to edify, comfort, or exhort others, as here, and see 1 Cor. 14. 3, &c.—*Bickersteth*.

Ver. 10—14. *False prophets endeavour to terrify Nehemiah.*

The jews' enemies tried to drive Nehemiah into the temple for his own safety; let him be any where but at his work. They designed to bring Nehemiah to do a foolish thing, that they might have matter for an evil report. This was doing the devil's work, who is men's tempter that he may be their accuser; who draws men to sin, that he may glory in their shame. The greatest mischief our enemies can do us, is, to frighten us from our duty, and bring us to do what is sinful. They made use of a pretended prophet

and prophetess, to persuade Nehemiah to quit his work and retire for his own safety. Shemaiah was shut up in his own house, perhaps under pretence of retirement for meditation, and to consult the mind of God, or to give Nehemiah a sign to make himself a recluse. Other prophets there were, and one prophetess, Noadiah, in the interest of the jews' enemies. Let us lament the wickedness of such as betray the cause of God and their country, under the pretence of communion with God, and concern for their country's welfare.

Good men like Nehemiah are in danger of being imposed upon by such cheats, for to them no temptation is of more force than that which comes under a colour of religion. But see how bravely Nehemiah vanquished this temptation. Though self-preservation is a fundamental principle of the law of nature, yet that is not always the best and wisest counsel, which pretends to go upon that principle. He immediately resolved not to yield. Holy courage and magnanimity will engage us, whatever it cost, never to decline a good work, never to do a bad one.

We ought to try all advice, and to reject what is contrary to the word of God. Every man should study consistency. Should I, a professed christian, called to be a saint, a child of God, a member of Christ, a temple of the Holy Ghost—should I appear covetous, sensual, proud, or envious? Should I yield to impatience, discontent, or anger? Should I be slothful, unbelieving, or unmerciful? What effects will such conduct have upon others? All that God has done for us, or by us, or given to us, should become arguments for watchfulness, self-denial, and diligence.

Nehemiah was immediately aware that Shemaiah gave this advice, not by any Divine direction, but with a design against him. The wickedness of such mercenary wretches, will, sooner or later, be brought to light. Nehemiah dreaded, 1. Offending God; that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin. Sin we should dread above any thing; and it is a good preservative against sin, to fear nothing but sin. 2. Shaming himself; that they might reproach him. Next to the sinfulness of sin, we should dread the scandalousness of it. He humbly begs God to reckon with them for their base designs upon him. He does not revengefully imprecate any judgment upon his enemies, but refers the matter to God. Whatever injuries are done us, we

must not avenge ourselves, but commit our cause to Him that judgeth righteously.

Ver. 15—19. *The wall finished—Treachery of some of the jews.*

Nehemiah finished the wall of Jerusalem, yet still had trouble created him by his enemies. The wall was begun and finished in fifty-two days, yet we have reason to believe they rested on the sabbaths. The threats of their enemies quickened them to go on with their work more vigorously. A great deal of work may be done in a little time, if we set about it in earnest, and keep close to it. The enemies perceived, by the wonderful success, that the work was wrought of God. Even these heathens saw a special providence of God conversant about the affairs of the church. Nehemiah saw some of his own people corresponding with Tobiah; a great grief and discouragement it doubtless was to him. They were sworn to Tobiah as their friend and ally, because both he and his son had married daughters of Israel. See the mischief of marrying with strangers. When once they became akin to Tobiah, they soon became sworn to him. A sinful love leads to a sinful league. The enemy of souls employs many instruments, and forms many projects, to take off, or to bring reproach upon the active servants of God. If the shepherd can be frightened away, the flock will be scattered. But we should imitate Him who laid down his life for the sheep. They that simply adhere to the Lord and his work will be supported.

The success of the gospel discourages God's enemies; they sometimes perceive it is his work, yet hate it the more. But false brethren are the severest trial to the Lord's faithful servants: many leading men, yea preachers and prophets, will be found workers of iniquity. But, under every discouragement, we should consider Jesus, who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, lest we be weary, and faint in our minds. After his example let us persevere, and in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

15. The walls and gates were not wholly pulled down by the chaldeans; the work completed within the time here mentioned was a repairing, not a new building.

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1—4. *Nehemiah commits the city to Hanani and Hananiah.*

It is supposed that Nehemiah, having finished the wall, returned to the persian

court, and afterwards came to Jerusalem again with a new commission. He placed his brother and Hananiah over the city in his absence. Many in Jerusalem feared God, but this good man was most eminent for religion and serious godliness. God's Jerusalem is likely to flourish, when those rule in it, and have charge of it, who excel in virtue, and are eminent both for godliness and honesty. Nehemiah gave orders about shutting of the gates, and guarding the walls. The walls enclosed the same ground as formerly, but the houses were not built, few, at least, in comparison with what had been; so that Nehemiah walled the city in faith, and with an eye to that promise of the replenishing of it, which God had lately made by the prophet Zechariah, 8. 3, &c. The public safety depends upon every one's particular care to guard himself and his family against sin, that common enemy. It is every one's interest to watch, but many understand not their own interest; it is therefore incumbent upon magistrates to appoint watches. And, as this people had lately found God with them in their building, else they had built in vain, so now that the wall was built, they were made sensible that except the Lord kept the city, the watchman waked but in vain, Psa. 127. 1, 2.

Ver. 5—73. *Register of the captives that returned at first.*

Nehemiah knew that the safety of a city, under God, depends more upon the inhabitants than upon its walls. Therefore he took an account of the people, that he might find what families formerly had their settlement in Jerusalem, that he might bring them back; and what families could be influenced to come and rebuild the houses in Jerusalem, and dwell in them. Observe whence this good design of Nehemiah's came; he owns, My God put it into my heart. Whatever good motion is in our minds, either prudent or pious, we must acknowledge it to come from God. We should continually pray that our God would put more and more good gifts into our hearts, and enable us to bring them to good effect. Every good gift and every good work are from above. He gives knowledge, he gives grace; all is *of* him, and therefore all must be *to* him. What is done by human prudence must be ascribed to the direction of Divine providence; he that teaches

the husbandman his discretion, Isa. 28. 26, teaches the statesman his.

Nehemiah reviewed the register of the genealogy of those who came up at the first, and compared the present accounts with that; and here we have the repetition of that from Ezra 2. Here are repeated and recorded, the names and numbers of their several families, and their oblations to the service of the temple. Though it seems of little use to us now, yet then it was of great use, to compare what they had been, with what they now were. Their genealogies would be preserved, and the distinction of their families kept up, till the Messiah should come, and then an end be put to all their genealogies, which were preserved for his sake, but afterward had no object. Blessed be God that our faith and hope are not built upon the niceties of names and numbers, genealogy and chronology, but on the great things of the law and gospel.

On the differences between this chapter and Ezra 2. it may suffice to remark, that the account in Ezra was taken in Chaldaea *before* the jews commenced their return, that in Nehemiah *after* their arrival in Jerusalem. Some staying behind, after they had resolved to go, others dying on the way, lessened part of the numbers in Nehemiah; while some coming to them afterwards, made the numbers in the latter appear the greater.—(33.)

The account of the offerings differs much from that, Ezra 2. 68, 69, and it may be questioned whether it refers to the same contribution. Whatever is given to the work of God he is not unrighteous to forget it; nor shall even a cup of cold water, wherewith he is honoured, go without reward. The Lord honoureth those who willingly endure hardship for his sake. He knoweth the names of all his people, and will produce the register at last. But woe to those who turn back from him, loving this present world; and happy they who dedicate themselves, and consecrate their substance, to his service and glory.

Nehemiah is supposed to have returned twice to the persian court. The first time, as soon as the walls of Jerusalem were completed. He came back to Jerusalem in a few months, and continued there as governor twelve years. After which he went again to the court, and resided there several years; during that interval the abuses occurred which he reformed on his subsequent return to Jerusalem, ch. 13.

Hales has shown that in consequence of their de-

feat by the athenians, the persians were now excluded from the whole line of sea coast in Asia, on which account it became the interest of the persian court to conciliate the jews, and to have the benefit of Jerusalem, being a fortified town. Thus God overruled the contests of nations to restore his people.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ver. 1—8. *The reading and expounding the law.*

In the seventh month the people assembled at Jerusalem, to keep the new moon and the feast of trumpets, which is called a sabbath, and on which they were to have a holy convocation, Lev. 23. 24; Numb. 29. 1. Upon that day the altar was set up, and they began to offer their burnt-offerings after their return out of captivity, a recent mercy, in the memory of many then living: in a thankful remembrance of that, they kept this feast with more than ordinary solemnity. Divine favours which are fresh in mind, and which we ourselves have been witnesses of, should be, and usually are most affecting.

The place was in a spacious broad street. Sacrifices were to be offered only at the door of the temple; but praying, and praising, and preaching were, and are services of religion as acceptably performed in one place as in another. When this congregation met in the street of the city, no doubt God was with them. All the people met; they voluntarily gathered together; not only men, but women and children, as many as were capable of understanding what they heard. Masters of families should bring their families with them to the public worship of God. Women and children have souls to save, and are therefore concerned to acquaint themselves with the word of God, and to attend on the means of knowledge and grace. Little ones, as they come to the exercise of reason, must be trained up in the exercises of religion.

Ezra the priest presided in this service. None so fit as he to expound and preach, who was such a ready scribe in the law of his God. God gave him ability and authority, and the people gave him opportunity and invitation. He stood in a pulpit or tower of wood, which they had made for the word, so it is in the original, for the preaching of the word. He had several assistants, some stood with him; others, ver. 7, seem to have been employed to read and expound to those who could not come within hearing of Ezra. The religious exercises were not ceremonial,

but spiritual, praying and preaching. Ezra blessed the Lord, and brought the law before the congregation. The book of the law is not to be confined to the scribe's studies, but to be brought before the congregation, and read to them in their own language. Ministers, when they go to the pulpit, should take their bibles with them; Ezra did so. Thence they must fetch their knowledge; according to that rule they must speak, and must show that they do so: see 2 Chron. 17. 9. He brought it forth with a sense of the great mercy of God to them in giving them that book; he opened it with a sense of his mercy to them in giving them leave to read it. Let us consider what we are doing, when we take God's book into our hands, and open it; also when we bow our knees in prayer: what we do, let us do it deliberately, Eccl. 5. 1.

Ezra and others read in the book of the law from morning till noon, and they read distinctly. Reading the scriptures in religious assemblies is an ordinance of God, whereby he is honoured, and his church edified. Upon special occasions, we should be willing to attend for many hours together, on the reading and expounding of the word of God. They were thus employed six hours. Let those who read and preach the word, learn to deliver themselves distinctly; as those who understand what they say, and are affected with it themselves; and who desire that those they speak to may understand, retain, and be affected with it likewise. What they read they expounded, showed the intent and meaning of it, and what use was to be made of it; they gave the sense in other words, that they might cause the people to understand the reading. It is requisite that those who hear the word, should understand it, else it is to them but an empty sound of words, Matt. 24. 15. It is therefore required of teachers that they explain the word, and give the sense of it. Reading is good, and preaching good, but expounding makes reading the more intelligible, and preaching the more convincing.

What contrition, what penitence, and what prayer was excited by this reading of the book of the law! It has pleased God in almost every age of the church to raise up not only those who have preached the gospel, but also those who have given us their views of Divine truth in writing; and though many who have attempted to

explain scripture have indeed egregiously failed, and have darkened counsel by words without knowledge, yet the labours of others are of excellent use. All that we hear must, however, be brought to the test of scripture, Acts 17. 11.—(5.)

The chaldee or syriac was now and henceforth the common language of the people, who with their religion lost a great part of their language, so that they needed the words to be translated, as well as the sense and meaning to be expounded.—(54.)

The people conducted themselves, 1. With great reverence, showing respect both to Ezra and to the word he was about to read. Where the word of God is precious, even inconvenient situations and uneasy postures will be patiently endured. 2. With great fixedness and composedness. Several ministers were reading and expounding at some distance from each other. Each of the people kept his post, did not go to hear first one and then another, but stood in his place, that he might neither give disturbance to another, nor receive any disturbance himself. 3. With great attention and a close application of mind. They heard readily, and minded every word. The word of God demands attention. If through carelessness we let much slip in hearing, there is danger that through forgetfulness we shall let all slip after hearing.

8. We learn from this text the nature of preaching or expounding the word of God at this period. They read in the book of the law of God. They expounded it, showing the import and true meaning of every word. They gave the sense. They caused them to understand the reading, caused them to know the Divine will. All this is still more necessary for us.—*A. Clarke.*

Ver. 9—12. *The people called upon to be joyful.*

The people were wounded with the words of the law. The law works death, shows men their sins, and their misery and danger because of sin. It was a good sign that their hearts were tender, when they heard the words of the law.

The people were to send portions to them for whom nothing was prepared. Christ directs those who make feasts to invite their poor neighbours, Luke 14. 13. But it is especially the duty of a religious feast, as well as of a religious fast, to draw out the soul to the hungry, Isa. 58. 7, 10. God's bounty should make us bountiful. Many will eat the fat, and drink the sweet themselves, even to excess, who will never allow portions, nor scarcely crumbs to the

poor; they may read their own doom in the parable of the rich man, Luke 16. 19, &c. We must not only give to those that offer themselves, but send to those out of sight. The liberal devises liberal things, and seeks objects of charity.

Their strength consisted in joy in the Lord. The comforts of his pardoning mercy, and the assurance of his presence, give that strength to the soul by which trials are supported, temptations resisted, and duties cheerfully performed. This holy joy, which the world cannot take away, arms the soul with holy resolution and diligence to abound in the work of the Lord. Continued sorrow and fear unfit the soul for the conflict. The assembly complied with the directions given them. They rejoiced; holy mourning makes way for holy mirth; they that sow in tears, shall reap in joy; they that tremble at the convictions of the word, may triumph in its consolations. The better we understand the word of God, the more comfort we shall find in it; for the darkness of trouble arises from the darkness of ignorance and mistake. When the words were first declared, they wept; but when they understood them, they rejoiced; finding, at length, precious promises to those who repented and reformed; and that therefore there was hope in Israel.

Ver. 13—18. *The feast of tabernacles—The joy of the people.*

The people had spent the greatest part of one day in praying and hearing, yet were so far from being weary, that the next day the chief of them came together again to hear Ezra expound; which they found more delightful and gainful than any worldly pleasure or profit. The more we converse with the word of God, if we rightly understand it, and are affected with it, the more we shall covet to increase our acquaintance with it. They that understand the scriptures well, will desire to understand them still better.

They found written in the law the Divine appointment of the feast of tabernacles. They that diligently search the scriptures will find things written there, which they have forgotten, or not duly considered. This feast of tabernacles was a memorial of the dwelling in tents in the wilderness; a representation of our tabernacle state in this world, and a type of the holy joy of the gospel church. The conversion of the nations to the faith of

Christ is foretold under the figure of this feast, Zech. 14. 16. They shall come to keep the feast of tabernacles, as having here no continuing city. True religion will render us strangers and pilgrims upon earth, and they that refuse conformity to the world, and have their conversation in heaven, must appear singular.

We read and hear the word acceptably and profitably, when we do according to what is written therein; when what appears our duty, after it has been neglected, is revived. This feast had usually been observed, 2 Chron. 5. 3; Ezra 3. 4, but never with such solemnity since Joshua's time, when they were newly settled, as now newly resettled in Canaan. They minded the substance; else the ceremony, how significant soever, had been insignificant. They did it rejoicing in God and his goodness. They attended the reading and expounding of the word of God, during all the days of the feast. Spare hours cannot be better spent than in studying the scriptures, and conversing with them. At this feast of tabernacles, God appointed the law to be read once in seven years, Deut. 31. 10, 11.

Ministers should produce scripture warrant for all their doctrines, applying the word in the most plain and simple manner to the hearts and consciences of the hearers. These are the means which the Spirit of God crowns with success, in bringing the hearts of sinners to tremble and become abased before God. This pierces the conscience, fills the soul with dismay, and prepares for the consolations of the gospel, whereby is the knowledge of salvation through the remission of sins. Thus the broken heart is bound up, and the sinner learns to rejoice in God our Saviour. Both godly sorrow and holy joy are profitable in their season. They that mourn for sin are to be comforted, instructed, and directed to rejoice in the Lord. This we have abundant reason to do, however many our sins have been, when we humbly come to trust in his mercy. His salvation is free; the provisions of his grace are plenteous; his righteousness is for ever; his ways are pleasantness; his protection sure; his consolations strong; and hope in his mercy maketh not ashamed, when his love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. They are enemies to their own growth in holiness, who always indulge sorrow, even for sin, and put from

them the consolations tendered by the word and Spirit of God.

CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 1—3. *A solemn fast.*

The children of Israel kept a public fast. It was a fast that men appointed, but such a fast as God had chosen, for it was a day of communion with God. They fasted to him, even to him, Zech. 7. 5; for, 1. They spake to him in prayer; offered pious and devout affections, in the confession of sin, and the adoration of him as the Lord and their God. 2. They heard him speaking to them by his word; in the glass of the law we may see our deformities and defilements, know what to acknowledge and what to amend. The word will direct and quicken prayer, for by it the Spirit helps our infirmities in prayer.

The careful study of God's word will more and more discover to us our own sinfulness, and the plenteousness of his salvation; thus call us to mourn for sin, and to rejoice in him. Every discovery of the truth of God, should render us more unwearied in our attendance on his sacred word, and on his worship.

Ver. 4—33. *The substance of the levites' prayer and confession of sin.*

They prayed to God, cried to him with a loud voice, for the pardon of the sins of Israel, and God's favour to them. They cried aloud; not that God might the better hear them, but that the people might, and to excite their fervency. They praised God; for the work of praise is not unseasonable on a fast day; in all acts of devotion, we must aim to give unto God the glory due to his name. The summary of their prayers we have here upon record. Much more, no doubt, was said. God is here adored as the one only living and true God; as the Creator of all things; as the great Protector of the whole creation; as the object of the creature's praises.

As the name of God is exalted above all blessing and praise, ver. 5, only our capacity measures our obligation. Whatever capacity or ability we have in our own persons, to do any thing in the way of duty towards this most excellent Being, we are to serve and glorify him according to the utmost of it. We can never overdo in point of duty towards Him in whatever capacity we stand.—(40.)

Here is a thankful acknowledgment of God's favours to Israel, many of which are here reckoned up in order before him, and very much to the purpose; for we must take all occasions to mention the loving-kindness of the Lord, and in every prayer give thanks. When confessing our sins, it is good to take notice of the mercies of God, that we may be the more humbled and ashamed. When we are seeking to God for mercy and relief, it is an encouragement to look back upon our own and our fathers' experiences. Art not thou the same God still? In reviewing God's conduct towards Israel as a people, from the call of Abraham to the days of Nehemiah, we see the continued display of his power, truth, and love, returned by ingratitude, perverseness, and disobedience. Their advantages were from his choice of them, and his gracious promises towards them. Yet, while surrounded by the riches of his bounty, and proofs of his power and presence; while his holy law sounded in their ears, and Sinai's fiery top was before their eyes, they rebelled against God. But he withdrew not his mercies from them, though they still continued their provocations. The dealings of the Lord towards them showed his goodness and long-suffering, and the hardness of their hearts. The testimony of the prophets was the testimony of the Spirit in the prophets, and it was the Spirit of Christ in them, 1 Pet. 1. 10, 11. They spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and what they said is to be received accordingly. God gave them his Spirit to instruct them; but they not receiving that instruction, he did, by his Spirit, testify against them. If we will not suffer God's word to teach and rule us, it will accuse and judge us. God sends prophets, in compassion to his people, 2 Chron. 36. 15, that he may not send judgments. Even when given up into the hand of their enemies, their temple, city, and country desolated, his tender mercy prevented his utterly casting them off. It was of his mercies that they were not consumed, and that at length a remnant was brought back to their own land.

The result was, admiration of the Lord's mercies, and an acknowledgment that sin had reduced them to their present state, from which nothing but unmerited love could rescue them. And is not their conduct a specimen of human

nature? Let us each study the history of our land, and our own history. Let us recollect our advantages from childhood, and ask what were our first returns? Did not revolving years witness increasing ingratitude and ungodliness? If ignorance, or self-flattery do not blind our minds, we shall see abundant cause for humiliation and gratitude—that all our sufferings have been justly merited, all our comforts mercifully bestowed. Besides temporal mercies, we are favoured with opportunities for becoming wise unto salvation, even beyond Israel in their most favoured times. We have been delivered from worse oppression than that of the egyptian tyrant. We are guided by a better light, and favoured with stronger consolations than Israel of old. We feed upon the Bread of life, which came down from heaven to give life to the world; we drink the waters which flow from the Rock of ages, who was smitten for us. The good Spirit of God is not only our Instructor and Sanctifier, but our Comforter also, who deigns to make our hearts his temple; and we possess the hope and earnest of everlasting glory. But what requital do *we* make? How oft do we forget God, grieve his Holy Spirit, and neglect his service! Were he not slow to anger, he would have cast us off long ago! But our heavenly Advocate still pleads, and we are spared; his mercies and our privileges are continued to us. Let us then praise his goodness, and confess our own unworthiness. Let us thank him for his merciful corrections, as well as his consolations. Let us renew our acceptance of his salvation, and ratification of his covenant. Let us beg of him to deliver us from all other lords, that we may serve him more entirely. And let us frequently make these reviews, that we may be kept humble, thankful, and watchful. Let all remember that pride, obstinacy, and impenitence are sins which ruin the soul.

It is often as hard to persuade the broken-hearted to hope, as formerly it was to induce them to fear. Is this thy case? Behold this sweet promise—a God ready to pardon! ver. 17. It should afford encouragement to those who have believed through grace. Believers are enemies to sin, but while in the body their duties are defiled, and they must exclaim, if thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand? But

instead of keeping away from God under a sense of our unworthiness, as the enemy of souls would urge, let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace, to help in time of need. He is a God ready to pardon.—(42.)

They came, at last, to this resolution—that they would return to God and to their duty, and oblige themselves always to continue in their duty. This covenant was made with serious consideration. It was written, that it might remain a memorial for all ages; it was sealed, and left upon record, that it might be a witness against them if they dealt deceitfully. A certain number of the princes, priests, and levites were chosen as representatives of the congregation, to subscribe and seal it in the name of the rest. Now was fulfilled the promise concerning the jews, that when they were returned out of captivity, they should join themselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, Jer. 50. 5, and Isa. 44. 5, that they should subscribe with their hand unto the Lord.

CHAPTER X.

Ver. 1—31. *The covenant—Those who signed it.*

When Israel was first brought into covenant with God, it was done by sacrifice, and the sprinkling of blood, Exod. 24. But here it was done by sealing and subscribing written articles of covenant, which bound them to no more than was already their duty. And here we have the names of public persons, who, as the representatives and heads of the congregations, set their hands and seals to this covenant. And if these leading men did their part in pursuance of this covenant, it would have a good influence upon all the people. Nehemiah, who was the governor, signed first, to set others a good example. Those who are above others in dignity and power, should go before them in the way of God.

The people and the priests and levites concurred. With them joined their wives and children; every one that had knowledge and understanding, was to covenant with God. As soon as young people grow up to be capable of distinguishing between good and evil, and of acting intelligently, they ought to make it their own act and deed to join the Lord. Also the proselytes of other nations, all that had sepa-

rated from the people of the lands, their gods and their worship, unto the law of God, and the observance of that law. See what conversion is—it is separating ourselves from the course and custom of this world, devoting ourselves to the conduct directed by the word of God.

By the general purport of this covenant, they laid upon themselves no other burden than what they were already obliged to by all other engagements of duty, interest, and gratitude—to walk in God's law, and to do all his commandments, ver. 29. When we bind ourselves to do the commandments of God, we bind ourselves to do *all* his commandments, and therein to look to him as the Lord, and our Lord. Some of the articles of this covenant were adapted to their present temptations. 1. That they would not intermarry with the heathen. Many of them had been guilty of this, Ezra 9. 1. 2. That they would keep no markets on the sabbath day, or any other day of which the law had said, Ye shall do no work therein. Those who covenant to keep all God's commandments, must particularly covenant to keep sabbaths well; for the profanation of them is an inlet to other instances of profaneness. The sabbath is a market-day for our souls, but not for our bodies. 3. That they would not be severe in exacting debts, but would observe the seventh year as a year of release, according to the law. In this matter they had been faulty, ch. 5. This was the acceptable fast, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, Isa. 58. 6. It was in the close of the day of expiation, that the jubilee trumpet sounded. It was for the neglect of observing the seventh year, as a year of rest for the land, that God had made it enjoy its sabbaths seventy years, Lev. 26. 35; 2 Chron. 36. 21.

Ver. 32—39. *Their engagement to renew the sacred rites.*

Having covenanted against the sins of which they had been guilty, they obliged themselves to revive and observe the duties they had neglected. We must not only cease to do evil, but learn to do well. It was resolved that the temple service should be done in its season, according to the law. Let not any people expect the blessing of God, unless they make conscience of observing his ordinances, and keeping up public worship. It is likely to go well with our houses, when care is

taken that the work of God's house goes on well. It was resolved, in pursuance of this, that they would liberally maintain the temple service. The priests were ready to do their part in all the work of God's house, if the people would do theirs. The people agreed to contribute yearly each the third part of a shekel. When every one will act, and every one gives, though but little, toward a good work, the whole amount will be considerable. The people made it an ordinance.

They provided that all things which the Divine law had appointed for the maintenance of the priests and levites, should be duly paid in. These dues had been withheld, for which God, by the prophet, charges them with robbing him, Mal. 3. 8, 9, at the same time encouraging them to be more just to him and his receivers. This they resolve upon—though they paid great taxes to the kings of Persia, and had much hardship put upon them, they would not make that an excuse, but would render to God the things that were his, as well as to Cesar the things that were his. We must do what we can in works of piety and charity, notwithstanding the taxes we pay; and whatever state we are placed in, cheerfully perform our duty to God, which will be the surest way to ease and liberty. As the ordinances of God are the appointed means of sustenance to our souls, the believer will not grudge the expense; yet most leave their souls to starve!

Our offended Sovereign, in his infinite mercy, hath provided a better covenant, according to which believers are delivered from the curse of the law, and are inclined to new and sincere obedience through Jesus Christ. The word of God calls us to partake of its inestimable benefits, and freely to engage for the obedience of faith. When we are brought to godly sorrow for sin; when we receive the atonement which the Mediator of this covenant hath made by his precious blood, and seek for mercy through his intercession, then our public sealing and ratifying the covenant, at the Lord's table, or in any other solemn way, will be honourable to God, edify others, and strengthen ourselves; and we may trust in the Lord to enable us to fulfil the engagements with acceptance. But when preparation of heart is wanting, public engagements will be mere hypocrisy. And we are not sincere in covenanting with God, if we allow ourselves in break-

ing one of his commandments habitually. If we do so, it is evident that we have not duly sought forgiveness of our transgressions; and that we do not desire the sanctifying Spirit of Christ to mortify that peculiar sinful propensity. Real believers use every means to avoid and subdue sins which have most ensnared them.

CHAPTER XI.

The distribution of the people.

Jerusalem was not at this time a place where men could get wealth. Few houses were built there. The enemies of the jews were particularly hostile to that city. The other places in the country afforded a better prospect of living in peace, and of becoming rich. Fear of persecution and reproach, and of running themselves into trouble, keep many out of the holy city, and make them backward to appear for God and religion; not considering that although Jerusalem is with a special malice threatened and insulted by its enemies, it is with a special care protected by its God, and made a quiet habitation, Psa. 46. 4, 5.

It was necessary that Jerusalem should be inhabited, for the re-establishment of the jews as a distinct nation, and for the honour and protection of the temple. It was the holy city, chosen, separated, and sanctified of God, for his presence and worship; it was a type of Christ, and of heaven; and the place where the greatest spiritual advantages were enjoyed. But the jews, for the most part, had not desire enough after spiritual improvement, to be willing to dwell there. Some few offered themselves, whom their brethren commended, thanked, and prayed for, though they would not imitate them. The rulers dwelt there to induce others, and one family in ten were selected by lot to remove thither. From this period the inhabitants of the city increased: it was very populous in the days of Christ, and when destroyed by the romans. Here is an account of the villages, or country towns, inhabited by the residue of Israel. There were divisions of the levites among both. We may suppose them safe and easy, though few and poor. Indeed, by the blessing of God, they were likely to increase in wealth and power; and they would have been more likely, if there had not been that general profaneness among them, and lukewarmness in religion, with

which Malachi charges them; who, it is supposed, prophesied about this time, in whom prophecy ceased for some ages, till it revived in the great Prophet, and his forerunner John the Baptist.

In all ages men have preferred their own ease and advantage to the public good. Even the professors of religion too commonly seek their own, and not the things of Christ. Few have had such attachment to holy things and holy places, as to renounce their pleasures for the sake of them. Yet surely where holy persons and opportunities of spiritual improvement most abound; where Jesus resides, there our souls should delight to dwell. If we have not this love to the city of our God, and to every thing that assists our communion with the Saviour, how shall we be willing to depart hence; to be absent from the body, that we may be present with the Lord? To the carnal-minded, the perfect holiness of the new Jerusalem would be still more intolerable than the holiness of God's church on earth. But the few who now offer themselves to self-denying and perilous services, from love to the church of God, and from zeal for his glory, shall be honoured; many will commend, who have not courage to imitate them. Our habitations are allotted by the Lord; we should not be hasty in changing them, though in some respects incommodious, especially if convenient for attendance on Divine ordinances. Let us seek first the favour of God, and his glory; let us study to be patient, content, and useful in our several stations, and wait in cheerful hope for admission into the holy city of God.

CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1—26. *The priests and levites that returned.*

In this chapter are preserved upon record the names of the chief of the priests and the levites that came up with Zerubbabel. Also the succession of the high priests; the names of the next generation of the other chief priests, and of the eminent levites in Nehemiah's time. It is a debt we still owe to faithful ministers, to remember our guides, who have spoken to us the word of God, Heb. 13. 7. It is good to know what our godly ancestors and predecessors were, that we may learn thereby what we should be.

There is a difference between the preceding enumeration and that in Chroni-

cles; this comprehends not only those who came first with Zerubbabel, but also those who came with Ezra and Nehemiah.—(30.)

11. Jaddua is supposed to have been the high priest in the days of Alexander the Great, whom Josephus reports to have met that conqueror when advancing to destroy Jerusalem; and that Alexander was so struck by his appearance and the statements he made, as to spare the city, and grant considerable privileges to the jews. This verse must have been added after the time of Nehemiah, probably by Simon the just.

Ver. 27—43. *The dedication of the wall.*

We read of the building of the wall of Jerusalem with fear and trembling; we have here an account of the dedicating it with joy and triumph. They that sow in tears, shall thus reap. It was a solemn thanksgiving to God for his great mercy to them, in perfecting this undertaking, which they were the more sensible of, because of the difficulty and opposition they had met with. They hereby devoted the city, in a peculiar manner, to God and to his honour. All our cities, all our houses, must have holiness to the Lord written upon them; but this city was so as never any other was, a holy city, the city of the great King, Psa. 48. 2, and Matt. 5. 35; it had been so ever since God chose it to put his name there, as such, it was again dedicated to God by the rebuilders and inhabitants. Whatever is done for their safety, ease, and comfort, must be designed for God's honour and glory. They hereby put the city and its walls under the Divine protection, owning that, unless the Lord kept the city, the walls were built in vain. When this city was possessed by the jebusites, they committed the guardianship to their gods, though blind and lame, 2-Sam. 5. 6. With much more reason do the people of God commit it to his keeping, who is all-wise and almighty. These pious founders looked to God only, to his providence, and not to fortune. The believer should undertake nothing which he does not dedicate unto the Lord.

There was a general assembly of all the levites. They purified themselves. We are concerned to cleanse our hands, and purify our hearts, when any work for God is to pass through them. They purified themselves, and then the people. They that would be instrumental to sanctify others, must sanctify themselves, and set themselves apart for God, with purity of mind, and sincerity of intention. To

those who are sanctified, all their creature-comforts and enjoyments are sanctified, 1 Tim. 4. 4, 5. This purification was performed, it is probable, by sprinkling the water of purifying, or of separation, Numb. 19. 9, on themselves and the people, the wall, and the gates—a type of the blood of Christ, with which, our consciences being purged from dead works, we become fit to serve the living God, Heb. 9. 14.

The princes, priests, and levites walked round upon the wall; one object of this ceremony being to affect them with the mercy they were giving thanks for, and to perpetuate the remembrance of it. The people greatly rejoiced. God overlooks not, but graciously accepts the honest, zealous services of mean people. It is observed, that the women and children rejoiced; and their hosannas were not despised, but recorded to their praise. All that share in public mercies, ought to join in public thanksgivings. The reason given is, that God had made them rejoice with great joy: his providence had made them safe and easy, and then his grace made them cheerful and thankful. The baffled opposition of their enemies, no doubt, added to their joy. Great mercies call for the most solemn returns of praise, in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem.

Ver. 44—47. *The officers of the temple settled.*

When the solemnities of a thanksgiving-day leave such impressions on ministers and people, that both are more careful and cheerful in doing their duty, they are indeed acceptable to God, and turn to good account. So it was here. The ministers were more careful than they had been of their work. The people were more careful than they had been of the maintenance of their ministers. They were glad when they observed how diligently they waited, and what pains they took in their work; they rejoiced in them. The surest way for ministers to recommend themselves to their people, and gain an interest in their affections, is to wait on their ministry, Rom. 12. 7. And whatever we sinners do, must be purified by the blood of sprinkling, and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, or it cannot be acceptable to God. The whole church of God, that portion of the human race which is the lot of his inheritance, and the object of his choice, is thus purified, or it could not be holy unto the Lord.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ver. 1—9. *Nehemiah turns out the mixed multitude from Israel.*

It was the honour of Israel, and the greatest preservation of their holiness, that they were a peculiar people, and were not to mingle with the nations, or suffer any to incorporate with them. They found a law, that the ammonites and moabites should not settle among them, nor unite with them, because they had been injurious to the Israel of God; and sought their ruin. This law we have, with this reason, Deut. 23. 3—5. The people readily complied. See the benefit of publicly reading the word of God, when it is duly attended to, it discovers to us sin and duty, good and evil, and shows us wherein we have erred. We profit by the discovery, when by it we are wrought upon to separate from the evil to which we had addicted ourselves. Few are acquainted with the whole of it; many break its injunctions through ignorance or inattention.

Tobiah was an ammonite; he had the same enmity to Israel, that his ancestors had; but Eliashib the chief priest was allied to Tobiah by marriage and by friendship. A wretched thing it was, that Tobiah the ammonite should be entertained with respect in Israel; that the high priest should, contrary to the law, give him entertainment, and lodge him in the courts of God's house; that he should throw out the stores of the temple, to make room for him. Thus did he corrupt the covenant of Levi, as Malachi complained. Nehemiah adds, But all this time was I not at Jerusalem. The envious one, who sows tares in God's field, knows how to take opportunity to do it when the servants sleep, or are absent, Matt. 13. 25. Nehemiah threw out Tobiah, and all that belonged to him, and restored the chambers to their proper use. Our Saviour thus cleansed the temple, that the house of prayer might not be a den of thieves. They that would expel sin out of their hearts, those living temples, must throw out its household stuff, and all the provision made for it; and take away all the things that are the food and fuel of lust; this is, in effect, to mortify it. The temple-stores shall be brought in again, and the vessels of the house of God put in their places; but the chambers must first be sprinkled with the water of purification, and so cleansed, because they had

been profaned. Thus when sin is cast out of the heart by repentance, let the blood of Christ be applied to it by faith, then let it be furnished with the graces of God's Spirit for every good work.

Ver. 10—14. *Nehemiah reforms the offices in the house of God.*

If a sacred character will not restrain men from setting an evil example, it must not shelter any one from censure and deserved punishment. The levites had been wronged; their portions had not been given them. They were gone to get livelihoods for themselves and their families, for their profession would not maintain them. A scandalous maintenance makes a scandalous ministry. The work is neglected, because the workmen are. Nehemiah laid the fault upon the rulers. Both ministers and people, who forsake religion and the services of it, and magistrates too, who do not what they can to keep them to it, will have much to answer for. He delayed not to bring the levites to their places again. He provided that just payment should be made.

Nehemiah was a man much in pious ejaculations; on every occasion, he looked up to God, and committed himself and all his affairs to Him. He here reflects with comfort and satisfaction upon what he had done; it pleased him to think that he had been any way instrumental to revive and support religion in his country, and to reform what was amiss. What kindness any show to God's ministers, it shall be returned into their own bosoms, in the secret joy they shall have there; not only in having done well, but in having done good to many, good to souls. He here refers himself to God, not in pride, or as boasting what he had done, much less depending upon it as his righteousness, or as if he thought he had made God a debtor to him; but in a humble appeal concerning his integrity, and honest intention in what he had done; and a believing expectation that God would not be unrighteous to forget his work and labour of love, Heb. 6. 10. Observe he only prays, Remember me—not, Reward me; Wipe not out my good deeds—not, Publish them, or record them. Yet he was rewarded, and his good deeds recorded. God does more than we are able to ask. Deeds done for the house of God and the offices of it, for the support of religion and the encouragement of it, are good deeds; there is

both righteousness and godliness in them. God will certainly remember them, and not wipe them out; they shall in no wise lose their reward.

Ver. 15—22. *The profanation of the sabbath restrained.*

The due observance of the Lord's day forms an important object for their attention who would promote true godliness. Nehemiah revived keeping holy the sabbath day, and maintained the authority of the fourth commandment. Where holy time is overlooked, it is not strange if holy duties are neglected. The law of the sabbath was much insisted on; and with good reason, for religion never prospers while sabbaths are trodden under foot. To his great grief, it appeared that there was a general profanation of the sabbath, even in Jerusalem, that holy city, which was so lately dedicated to God. The husbandmen and the carriers pursued their usual employments. The men of Tyre, that famous trading city, sold all manner of ware on the sabbath day; the children of Judah and Jerusalem had so little grace as to buy of them, and so encouraged them in making our Father's day a day of merchandise. No wonder there was a general decay of religion and corruption of manners among this people, when they forsook the sanctuary, and profaned the sabbath. They little consider what an evil they do who profane the sabbath; when it becomes general, it opens the way to impiety, licentiousness, and infidelity, and brings heavy wrath from God upon guilty nations.

Nehemiah testified against those who profaned the sabbath, to convince them it was a great sin, and reasoned with the rulers concerning it. They did not carry corn, nor sell wares, but they connived at those who did so, and did not use their power to restrain them, and so made themselves guilty. They set a bad example in other things; if the nobles allowed themselves in sports and recreations, in idle visits, and idle talk, on the sabbath day, the men of business, both in city and country, would profane it by worldly employments, as more justifiable. We are responsible for the sins others are led to commit by our example. He charges it upon them as an evil thing, for so it is, proceeding from a great contempt of God and our own souls. He shows that sabbath-breaking was one of the sins for which God had brought judgments

upon them; and that if they did not take warning, but returned to the same sins again, they had to expect further judgments. Thus Ezra 9. 14. Nehemiah took care to prevent the profanation of the sabbath, as one that aimed only at reformation; if he could reform, he would not punish, and if he should punish, it was but that he might reform. If reformers will put on resolution, more may be done toward the breaking of bad customs than they imagine. The courage, zeal, and prudence of Nehemiah in this matter, are recorded for imitation; and we have reason to think that the cure he wrought was lasting.

He concludes this passage with a prayer. Observe, 1. The petitions; Remember me. He adds, Spare me; so far is he from thinking that what he had done merited a reward, that he cries earnestly to God to spare him, as Jeremiah 10. 24; 15. 15; 17. 17. The best saints, even when they do the best actions, need sparing mercy; for there is not a just man that doeth good, and sinneth not. 2. The plea; According to the greatness (or multitude) of thy mercies. God's mercy is what we must depend upon, and not any merit of our own, whenever we appear before him.

Nehemiah spake not with the arrogant expectations of a pharisee, as if he had any claim on God for his services, or trusted to them for his acceptance and salvation. It is evident he felt and confessed himself a sinner, who could demand nothing from God on the ground of justice, when he thus cried unto him for mercy.—(60.)

Ver. 23—31. *The dismissal of strange wives.*

We have here one instance more of Nehemiah's pious zeal for the purifying of his countrymen, as a peculiar people to God, at which he aimed in the use of his power, not the enriching of himself. They had corrupted themselves by marrying strange wives. This was complained of in Ezra's time, and much was done towards a reformation, Ezra 9. and 10. But when the unclean spirit is cast out, if a watchful eye be not kept, he will re-enter; so Satan did here. See how God by the prophet reproves this, Mal. 2. 11. Nehemiah talked with the children, and found they were children of strangers, for their speech bewrayed them. Children, in their childhood, learn much of their mothers. If either side be ungodly, the

corrupt nature will incline the children to take after that; which is a strong reason why christians should not be unequally yoked. In the education of children great care should be taken about the government of their tongues; that they learn not the language of Ashdod, no impious or impure talk, no corrupt communication.

Nehemiah showed the evil of these marriages, and the obligation he lay under to witness against them. The falls of great and good men are recorded, that we may take warning by them. Solomon was famous for wisdom, yet, when he married strange wives, his wisdom could not secure him, nay, it departed from him, and he did very foolishly. Therefore let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall, when he runs on such a precipice. When Nehemiah had silenced them, he cursed them; that is, he denounced the judgments of God against them, and showed them what their sin deserved. Some, more obstinate than the rest, he smote, that is, ordered them to be beaten by the proper officers according to the law, Deut. 25. 2, 3. He found upon inquiry, that one of the high priest's grandsons had married a daughter of Sanballat, that notorious enemy of the jews, ch. 2. 10; 4. 1. How little love had that man either to God or his country, who could make himself, in duty and interest, a friend to him who was a sworn enemy to both. Nehemiah degraded him, and made him for ever incapable of the priesthood. Josephus says that this expelled priest was Manasseh; and that he went to his father-in-law Sanballat, who built him a temple upon mount Gerizim, like that at Jerusalem; and that then was laid the foundation of the samaritans' pretensions, which continued to our Saviour's time, John 4. 20.

Here are Nehemiah's prayers on this occasion. He prays, Remember them, O my God, ver. 29. Lord, convince and convert them; put them in mind of what they should be and do, that they may come to themselves. Or, this prayer is a prophecy, that God would remember it against them. They that defile the priesthood, despise God, and shall be lightly esteemed. He prays, Remember me, O my God. The best services done to the public have sometimes been forgotten by those for whom they were done, Eccl. 9. 15, therefore Nehemiah refers himself to

God, to recompense him. This may well be the summary of our petitions; we need no more to make us happy than this; Remember me, O my God, for good. We may humbly hope that the Lord will remember us and our services, although they are at best defective and defiled.

While we have respect unto the recompence of reward, we remember this is given us by the covenant, and is entirely of grace, not of debt, Rom. 4. 4. For after lives of unwearied activity and extensive usefulness, we shall still see cause to abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes, and to cry out with Nehemiah, Spare me, O my God, according to the greatness of thy mercy.—(60.)

Of Nehemiah the jews speak as one of the greatest men of their nation. His concern for his country, manifested by such unequivocal marks, entitles him to the character of the first patriot that ever lived. In the course of the Divine providence he was a captive in Babylon; but there his excellences were so apparent, that he was

chosen by the persian king to fill an office the most respectable, and the most confidential in the whole court. There he lived in ease and affluence; he lacked no manner of thing that was good: and there he might have continued to live, in the same affluence and in the same confidence; but he could enjoy neither, so long as he knew his people distressed, the sepulchres of his fathers trodden under foot, the altars of his God overturned, and his worship either totally neglected or corrupted. He sought the peace of Jerusalem; he prayed to God for it; and was willing to sacrifice wealth, ease, safety, and even life itself, if he might be the instrument of restoring the desolations of Israel. And God, who saw the desire of his heart, and knew the excellences with which he had endowed him, granted his request, and gave him the high honour of restoring the desolated city of his ancestors, and the pure worship of their God. On this account he has been considered by several as an expressive type of Jesus Christ; and many parallels have been shown in their lives and conduct.—For disinterestedness, philanthropy, patriotism, prudence, courage, zeal, humanity, and every virtue that constitutes a great mind, and proves a soul in deep communion with God, Nehemiah will ever stand conspicuous among the greatest men of the jewish nation, and he presents an example worthy to be copied by the first patriots in every nation under heaven.—*A. Clarke.*

THE BOOK OF ESTHER.

We read in the two foregoing books how the providence of God watched over the jews that returned out of captivity to their own land, and what great and kind things were done for them; but there were many who stayed behind. We find in this book, that even those jews who were thus scattered in the provinces of the heathen were taken care of, and were wonderfully preserved, when doomed to destruction. We are told, ch. 9. 20, that Mordecai wrote these things; and therefore some think he was the penman of the whole book. Though the name of God be not in it, the finger of God is, directing many minute events for the bringing about of his people's deliverance.

Another opinion, and which may account for the omission of the name of God in this book, is, that it is a translated extract from the memoirs of the reign of the persian monarch Ahasuerus: see ch. 2. 23; 6. 1; 10. 2. This accounts for the numerous parentheses which interrupt the narrative to subjoin the illustrations necessary for a jewish reader, and removes some other critical difficulties.

Let us read this book with attention. Is the *name* of God not in this book? If the wonderful works of God declare his name to be near, it is written in large characters in the book of Esther! Is the *name* of our Lord Jesus Christ not to be found in this book? Are we not taught very plainly by Moses and the prophets, that the Son of God, the Angel of his presence, was the Saviour of Israel in every age? Was he not the Author of the great deliverance wrought for his people in the days of Esther? and do we not learn the glory of his grace, wisdom, and power from this his work?

The reader's attention may be called to the discoveries here made of the desperate wickedness of the human heart; of the vanity and uncertainty of earthly greatness; of the impotent rage and malice of persecutors; of God's wise and gracious providence in the government of the church and the world; and of the safety and happiness of all those that trust in and serve him. It is a kind of epitome of courts and kings, and exhibits a striking picture of the instability of human greatness, particularly when at its highest pitch, if not attained by integrity, and possessed with moderation.

The history in this book comes in between the sixth and seventh chapters of Ezra. The institution of the festival of purim, and its continued observance to the present time, is a convincing evidence of the truth and genuineness of the book of Esther. It has always been received as canonical by the jews, who hold this book in the highest estimation.

CHAPTER I.

Ver. 1—9. *The royal feast of Ahasuerus.*

AHASUERUS appears to have been Artaxerxes Longimanus, the same king who commissioned both Ezra and Nehemiah. Here is an account of the vast extent of

his dominions, from India to Ethiopia: an overgrown kingdom, which, in time, would sink with its own weight; but Christ's kingdom shall be far larger when the kingdoms of the world all become his; and it shall be everlasting.

The pride of Ahasuerus' heart rising

with the grandeur of his kingdom, he made a most extravagant feast, wherein he put himself to vast expense and trouble, to show the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the honour of his excellent majesty. This was vain glory. Better is a dinner of herbs with quietness, than this banquet of wine, with all the noise and tumult that must have attended it. Such an exercise of generosity and magnificence for a man's own honour and glory is common. Except grace prevails in the heart, self-exaltation and self-indulgence, in one form or another, will be the ruling principle.

Good order, in some respects, was kept. There was no forcing of healths, nor urging them; none did compel; every man drank as he pleased; so that if any drank to excess, it was their own fault, a fault which few would commit, when the king's order put an honour upon sobriety. This caution of a heathen prince, even when he would show his generosity, may shame many who are called christians; who think they do not sufficiently show their good housekeeping, nor bid their friends welcome, unless they make them drunk; and, under pretence of sending the health round, send sin round, and death with it. There is a woe to them that do so; let them read it, and tremble, Hab. 2. 15, 16. It is robbing men of their reason, the greatest wrong that can be committed.

If the feast of an earthly monarch was so magnificent, what will be the feast of the King of kings in heaven, for ever and ever! There will be unfading splendour, and pleasures without exhaustion or satiety. There will be no danger of excess or discord throughout the ages of eternity. All things are ready for this feast; we are all invited. May we accept the gracious invitation, seek and find the wedding garment, Matt. 22. 11, and sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

1. There is considerable diversity of opinion who was the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther. Some have supposed Xerxes, others Darius, the son of Hystaspes. The opinion generally adopted is that of *Prideaux*, who, in accordance with *Josephus*, and the *Septuagint*, shows that he most probably was Artaxerxes Longimanus. *Hales* agrees in this opinion. From hence it is supposed that the permission granted to Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem may, in part at least, be assigned to the influence of Esther and Mordecai, as well as other favours received by the Jewish nation. This would also assist in accounting for the pious views stated by Artaxerxes, Ezra 7. 23

6. Or couches on which the guests reclined, as usual among the ancients at their meals.

Ver. 10—22. *Vashti's refusal to appear at the king's feast—The king divorces her—His decree.*

Ahasuerus' feast ended in heaviness, by his own folly. Seasons of peculiar festivity often end in vexation. Caprice rather than judgment dictates the conduct; unreasonable demands and projects are formed and made; men's spirits brook not contradiction or affront. And it was certainly the king's weakness to send for Vashti. It was against the custom of the Persians for women to appear in public. Superiors should be careful not to command what may reasonably be disobeyed; inferiors never ought to persist in refusals, unless from a point of conscience towards God. But when wine is in, men's reason departs from them.

He that had rule over 127 provinces, had no rule over his own spirit. But though very angry, he would not do any thing till he advised with his privy counsellors. Memucan shows the bad consequences of the queen's disobedience. He pleads the good consequence of a decree against Vashti, that she should be divorced. It is the interest of states and kingdoms, to provide that good order be kept in private families. The edict passed, signifying that the queen was divorced for contumacy, according to the law; and that if other wives were, in like manner, undutiful to their husbands, they must expect to be in like manner disgraced!

Domestic subordination doubtless ought to be preserved. The wife ought to honour, and in all lawful things to obey her husband; yet surely this may be effected by other means than severe laws, divorces, and other pernicious measures. Regard to mutual interest and reputation will go far to keep the world in order; but true grace thoroughly cures the evil from whence domestic discord arises.

The king, nobles, and princes durst not trust the good sense of their wives, but expected that Vashti's disobedience would be made a pretext for disobedience to themselves. What could be expected from women held in the chains of ignorance and slavery, as the women of the east were and are, but that they would seize every pretext to disentangle themselves from their fetters? Better things may be expected from those trained up in the knowledge of true religion, and indulged with reasonable liberty.—(46.)

Whether the passion or the policy of the king was served by this edict, God's providence made way for Esther to the crown, and defeated Haman's diabolical project before it had entered into his heart, and he had arrived at his power. Let us rejoice that the Lord reigns, and will overrule the madness or folly of mankind for the purposes of his own glory, and the safety and happiness of his people.

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1—20. *Esther chosen queen.*

When the anger of Ahasuerus subsided, his affection for Vashti revived; but with all his authority he could not again receive her into favour, without violating a fundamental constitution of the persian government, which required that no edict the king had once established should be reversed, Dan. 6. 15. The fatal effects of this absurd policy are illustrated in the course of this narrative. But even this law would fail to restrain the kings if their passions were vehemently engaged; there was reason for the counsellors to apprehend he might take back Vashti to their ruin, if they did not otherwise occupy his affections. We may see, by the narrative here given, to what absurd practices those came, who were destitute of Divine revelation. See what need there was of the gospel of Christ, to purify men from the lusts of the flesh, and to reduce them to the original institution. Esther was preferred as queen. It is certain, that those who suggest that Esther committed a great sin to come at this dignity, do not consider the custom of those times and countries. Every one that the king took was married to him, and was his wife of a lower rank; her situation was not deemed dishonourable or unlawful, even among the jews.

The higher men are advanced in authority, the lower they often sink in slavery to their sensual appetites. How low is human nature sunk when such as these are the leading pursuits and highest happiness of men; when every consideration of decency, equity, and conscience, even health, life, and the immortal soul itself, are sacrificed! Disappointment and vexation must ensue; and he most wisely consults his enjoyment, even in this present life, who most exactly obeys the precepts of the Divine law. But let us turn our eyes from this scene, to consider the wise and merciful providence of God, carrying

on his deep but holy designs in the midst of all this.

Esther was a captive, an orphan, her father and mother were both dead; but when they forsook her, then the Lord took her up, Psa. 27. 10. Let God be acknowledged in raising up friends for the fatherless and motherless; let it be an encouragement to that pious instance of charity, that many who have taken care of the education of orphans, like Mordecai, have lived to see the good fruit of their care and pains abundantly to their comfort. She honoured him as her father. This is an example to orphans; if they fall into the hands of those who love them and take care of them, let them make suitable returns of duty and affection. Mordecai did not bid her deny her country, nor tell a lie to conceal her parentage; if he had, she must not have done it; but he bid her not proclaim it. Who would have thought that a jew, a captive, an orphan, was born to be a queen, an empress! Yet so it proved. They that make sure of God's favour, shall find favour with man too, as far as it is good for them. She was not so solicitous as the rest to set herself off; she required nothing but just what was appointed her; and yet she was most acceptable. Notice is taken of the honours the king put upon Esther, and of the deference Esther continued to pay to her former guardian. Mordecai sat in the king's gate; he was one of the door-keepers. Whether he had this place before, or Esther obtained it for him, we are not told; but there he sat contented; yet Esther, who was advanced to the throne, was observant of him. This was evidence of a humble and grateful disposition; she had a sense of his former kindness, and his continued wisdom. It is a great ornament to those that are advanced, and much to their praise, to remember benefactors, to retain impressions of good education, to be diffident, willing to take advice, and thankful for it.

Let no change in condition be a pretext for forgetting duties owing to parents, or friends who have stood in the place of parents. Esther, when a queen, showed the same deference to Mordecai as when dependent on him. Our Lord Jesus Christ was more highly raised above his mother, for he was the Son of God; yet he was subject to his parents while he lived with them; and when he hung upon the cross,

he provided another son for his mother, to comfort her when He should leave the world.—(46.)

Ver. 21—23. *Mordecai discovers a plot against the king.*

Mordecai discovered a plot against the life of the king. As soon as he knew it, he caused it to be made known to the king; which ought to be an instruction and example to all good subjects, not to conceal any bad design they know of against the prince or the public peace. The traitors were hanged, as they deserved, but not till it was fully proved against them; and the whole was recorded with a particular remark, that Mordecai was the man who discovered the treason. He was not rewarded presently, but a book of remembrance was written. Thus, with respect to those who serve Christ, though their recompence is not till the resurrection of the just, yet an account is kept of their work of faith and labour of love, which God is not unrighteous to forget, Heb. 6. 10. The servant of God must be faithful to every trust, and watchful for the safety and interest of those who employ him. Though he may appear to be neglected now, he will be remembered hereafter. His conscientious and upright conduct is registered in heaven.

It was a wise institution in Persia, that every memorable action of the king, and every event of his reign, should be registered. Suppose we knew that some invisible scribe registered all we think, or speak, or do, what manner of persons should we endeavour to be in the exercise of every virtue! Know, then, that none of our actions can be forgotten; that even our most secret thoughts are written in durable registers, Rev. 20. 12.—(46.)

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1—6. *Haman, displeased with Mordecai, seeks the destruction of the jews.*

Haman was an agagite, an amalekite, says Josephus, probably, of the descendants of Agag, a common name of the princes of Amalek, Numb. 24. 7. The king made him his favourite, his prime minister. The favourites of earthly princes have often been distinguished by their folly, pride, and profligacy; but the favourites of the King of heaven are endowed with wisdom and grace, and are prepared for usefulness in their situations.

Mordecai refused to reverence Haman

as the rest of the king's servants did. His refusal was pious and conscientious; for the religion of a jew forbade him to give such extravagant honours to any mortal man, especially to so wicked a man as Haman. Probably the homage required by Haman savoured of idolatry. When the pride of man has been fed by great prosperity, it is capable of affecting honour and worship due to God alone. By nature all are idolaters, self is our favourite idol, we are pleased to be treated as if every thing were at our disposal.

Mordecai especially thought it injustice to his nation to honour an amalekite, one of that devoted nation with which God had sworn that he would have perpetual war, Exod. 17. 16, and concerning which he gave that solemn charge, Deut. 25. 17. Though religion does by no means destroy good manners, but teaches us to render honour to whom honour is due, yet it is the character of a citizen of Zion, that not only in his heart, but in his eyes, such a vile person as Haman was, is contemned, Psa. 15. 4. Let those who are governed by principles of conscience, be steady and resolute, however censured or threatened, as Mordecai was. The true believer cannot obey such edicts, or conform to such fashions, as violate the law of God. He must obey God rather than man, and leave the consequences to him.

Haman was full of wrath. It is soon resolved that Mordecai must die. It is as penal, in this court, not to worship Haman, as it was, in Nebuchadnezzar's, not to worship the golden image which he had set up. Haman thinks Mordecai's life not a satisfaction for the affront; therefore he vows the destruction of all his people. Herein Haman shows intolerable pride, insatiable cruelty, and the ancient antipathy of an amalekite to the Israel of God. His design is, to destroy all the jews throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus; which would include those returned to their own land, for that was a province of his kingdom. We may perceive this device was inspired by that ambitious spirit, who has been a murderer from the beginning; whose enmity to the Seed of the woman, to Christ and his church, is communicated to all his children.

2. Had this meant only civil reverence, the king needed not to have commanded it, nor would Mordecai have refused it. There was therefore some kind of Divine honour intended, such as was paid to the persian kings, and which even the greeks refused.—*Greenfield.*

Ver. 7—15. *Haman obtains a decree of the king to destroy the jews.*

Haman obtained what he desired, a full commission to do what he would with the jews. He seems not even to have mentioned the name of the people whom he intended to destroy; they would be known from his description of them. Without some acquaintance with the human heart, and the history of mankind, we should not conceive that any prince could consent to such a dreadful proposal, so injurious to himself. Let us be thankful for mild, limited, and equitable government. He offers, if the king will consent, to pay him about four millions sterling. It seems that he meant to reimburse himself from the property of the slaughtered jews. Ungodly men often find means by one crime to indemnify themselves for the expenses of others.

Haman inquires of his idols, according to his own superstitions, how to find a lucky day for the designed massacre. The resolve was taken up in the first month, in the twelfth year of the king, when Esther had been his wife about five years. As if he doubted not but that Heaven would favour his design, he refers it to the lot, that is, to the Divine Providence, to choose the day for him; but that fell upon the twelfth month, so that Mordecai and Esther had eleven months for defeating his design. Haman, though eager to have the jews cut off, yet submits to the laws of his superstition. This may shame us, who often acquiesce not in the directions and disposals of Providence, when they cross our desires and intentions. He that believes the lot, much more he that believes the promise, will not make haste. But God's wisdom serves its own purposes by men's folly. Haman has appealed to the lot, and to the lot he shall go, which, by adjourning the execution, gives judgment against him! The event showed the vanity of such oracles or auguries, and illustrates the doctrine of a particular providence over all the affairs of men, and the care of God over his church.

The bloody edict is published. Had the decree been to banish all the jews, and expel them the king's dominions, it had been severe; but surely never any such act of cruelty appeared as this—to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish all the jews; appointing them as sheep for the slaughter, without showing any cause. We have reason to be thankful

for outward restraints on our headstrong passions. If left to them, we cannot say how far they might hurry us. Thus have the church's enemies thirsted after blood, the blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus.

Haman was afraid lest the king's conscience should smite him for what he had done; to prevent which, he kept him drinking: this cursed method many often take to drown convictions, and to harden their own hearts and the hearts of others, in sin. The city was very sad upon it, not only the jews, but every person that had any principles of justice and compassion.

All appeared in a favourable train to accomplish the project. But though sinners are permitted to proceed to the point they aim at, an invisible almighty Power turns them back, 2 Kings 19. 28. How vain and contemptible are the strongest assaults against Jehovah! Psa. 2. 4. Had Haman obtained his wish, and the jewish nation perished, what must have become of all the promises? How could the prophecies concerning the great Redeemer of the world have been fulfilled? Thus the everlasting covenant itself must have failed before this diabolical project could take place!—(60.)

13. The extent of the danger of the jews may be understood when we consider that at that period the whole nation was within the boundaries of the persian empire, and could not escape from under the universal power of its monarch. Judea itself was a province of that empire.

CHAPTER IV.

Ver. 1—4. *The jews lament their danger.*

Mordecai not only gave vent to his own sorrows, but excited the attention of his people to their danger, and to the proper mode of seeking deliverance. He avowed his relation to the jews. Public calamities, that oppress the church of God, should affect our hearts more than any private affliction, and it is peculiarly distressing to occasion sufferings to others. Being able to appeal to God, that what he did proceeded from a principle of conscience, Mordecai could with comfort commit his own cause, and that of his people, to Him that judgeth righteously. God will keep those that are exposed by the tenderness of their consciences. The jews in every province laid it much to heart. Esther the queen was exceedingly grieved; Mordecai's grief was hers; such respect did she still retain for him, though a queen.

Ver. 5—17. *Esther undertakes to apply to the king in behalf of the jews.*

So strict were the laws of Persia that it was not possible for Mordecai to have a conference with Esther; but he sent her a charge to intercede with the king in this matter. She also sent her case to Mordecai, stating that she could not, without peril of her life, address the king. We are prone to shrink from services that are attended with peril or loss, and to think ourselves excused for neglecting opportunities of usefulness, if at the hazard of liberty or life. But when the cause of Christ and his people demand it, we must take up our cross, and follow him. As the disciples of Him who laid down his life for us, nothing will excuse neglecting our duty. When therefore christians are disposed to consult their own ease or safety, rather than the public good, they should be plainly remonstrated with.

The law was express, all knew it. This made the royal palace little better than a royal prison, and the kings themselves a terror to others, and a burden to themselves. It is not thus in the court of the King of kings: to the footstool of his throne of grace we may, at any time, come boldly, and may be sure of an answer of peace to the prayer of faith. We are welcome, even into the holiest, through the blood of Jesus. And we cannot come uncalled to God's presence when we plead the Saviour's name; our danger consists in keeping at too great a distance, not in coming too near. It is our own fault if we have not daily access to him, and communion with him.

Esther's case was very discouraging. Providence so ordered it, that, just then, the king's affections had cooled toward her; her faith and courage thereby were the more tried; and God's goodness in the favour she now found with the king thereby shone the brighter. Haman endeavoured to divert the king from thinking of what he had done, and Esther was neglected; from whom, no doubt, he did what he could to alienate the king. Mordecai suggests to her, 1. That it was her own cause, for the decree to destroy all the jews, did not except her. 2. That it was a cause which, one way or other, would certainly be carried, and which therefore she might safely venture in. This was the language of strong faith, which staggered not at the promise when the danger was most threatening, but

against hope believed in hope. Instruments may fail, but God's covenant will not. 3. That if she deserted her friends now, through cowardice and unbelief, she would have reason to fear that some judgment from Heaven would be the ruin of her and her family, when the rest of the families of the jews should be preserved. He that by sinful shifts will save his life, and cannot find in his heart to trust God with it in the way of duty, shall lose it in the way of sin. 4. That Divine Providence had regard to this, in bringing her to be queen. Therefore thou art bound in gratitude to do this service for God and his church, else thou dost not answer the end of thine elevation. Thou needest not fear the enterprise. God designed thee for it, he will bear thee out, and give thee success. There is a wise counsel and design in all the providences of God, which is unknown to us till it is accomplished; but it will prove, in the issue, that they are all intended for the good of the church. We should, every one, consider for what end God has put us in the place where we are, and study to answer that end: and when any particular opportunity of serving God and our generation offers, we must take care that we do not let it slip.

Esther resolved, whatever it cost her, to apply to the king; but not till she and her people had applied to God, in whose hand are the hearts of kings; and on whom she depended to incline the king's heart toward her. She went in peril of her life, but would think herself safe, when she had committed the keeping of her soul to God, and had put herself under his protection. She believed that God's favour was to be obtained by prayer, that his people are a praying people, and he a prayer-hearing God. She promised that she and her family would sanctify the fast in her apartment of the palace, for she might not come to their assemblies. Here is a good example of a mistress praying with her maids, and it is worthy to be imitated. Observe also, those who are confined to privacy may join their prayers with those of the solemn assemblies of God's people; they that are absent in body, may be present in spirit. Those who desire, and have the prayers of others, must not think that will excuse from praying for themselves.

Having solemnly commended our souls and our cause to God, we may venture

upon his service without distressing fear. All dangers are trifling except the danger of losing our souls. But the trembling sinner is often as much afraid of casting himself, without reserve, upon the Lord's free mercy, as Esther was of coming before the king. Let him venture, as she did, with earnest prayer and supplications, and he shall fare as she did. The cause of God must prevail; our safety and interest consist in being united to it, coming ourselves to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1—8. *Esther's application to the king favourably received.*

On the third day, before the conclusion of the solemn fast, while the jews were engaged in their devotions, Esther, having sought the Lord's protection, ventured to intrude upon the king's retirement. When the heart is enlarged in communion with God, it will be imboldened in doing and suffering for him. When the king saw her, she obtained favour in his sight. He protected her from the law, and assured her of safety. Thus having had power with God and prevailed like Jacob, she had power with men too. He that will lose his life for God, shall save it, or find it in a better life.

The king encouraged her. God can turn the hearts of men, of great men, of those that act most arbitrarily, which way he pleases. Esther feared that she should perish, but is promised that she shall have what she asks for, though it were the half of the kingdom. God in his providence often prevents the fears, and outdoes the hopes of his people, especially when they venture in his cause. Let us from this account infer, as our Saviour does from the parable of the unjust judge, an encouragement to pray always to our God, and not faint, Luke 18. 6—8. Hear what this haughty king says, "What is thy petition, and what is thy request? It shall be granted thee;" and say, Shall not God hear and answer the prayers of his own elect, that cry day and night to him? Esther came to a proud imperious man, we come to the God of love and grace. She was not called, we are; the Spirit says, Come, and the Bride says, Come. She had a law against her, we have a promise, many a promise in favour of us—Ask, and it shall be given you.

She had no friend to introduce her, or intercede for her; on the contrary, he that was then the king's favourite, was her enemy; but we have an Advocate with the Father, in whom he is well pleased. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace.

All the request she had to make to him, at this time, was, that he would come to a banquet, and bring Haman. Hereby, 1. She would intimate to him, how much she valued his favour and company. 2. She would try how he stood affected to her. 3. She would endeavour to soften his spirit, that he might with the more tenderness receive the complaint she had to make. 4. She would please him by inviting Haman his favourite. 5. She hoped, at the banquet, to have a fairer and more favourable opportunity of presenting her petition. Wisdom is profitable to direct how to manage some that are hard to deal with. The king readily came, and renewed his kind inquiry. Esther thought fit to ask no more than a promise that he would please to accept another banquet. This may be attributed to Esther's prudence; thus she hoped yet further to win upon him. Perhaps her heart failed her, and she desired further time for prayer that God would give her wisdom. While we trust in the protection of the Almighty, we should exercise wisdom as well as courage, and this also we must ask of God. God put it into Esther's heart to delay her petition a day longer; she knew not, but God did, what was to happen in that very night.

Ver. 9—14. *Haman prepares to hang Mordecai.*

This account of Haman is a comment upon Prov. 21. 24. He valued himself, that Esther the queen let no man come with the king to the banquet but himself, and that the next day she had invited him also to come with the king. Self-admirers and self-flatterers are really self-deceivers. But he was vexed and fretted at the slight Mordecai put upon him. Mordecai knew that God could and would deliver him and his people from the rage of Haman, without any mean expedients. They that walk in holy sincerity, may walk in holy security; and go on in their work, not fearing what man can do unto them. Haman, the higher he is lifted up, the more impatient he is of contempt, and the more enraged at it. This affront from Mordecai spoiled all; he owned, to the everlasting reproach of a proud and

discontented mind, that he had no comfort in his estate, preferment, and family, as long as Mordecai lived, and had a place in the king's gate. A slight affront, which a humble man would scarcely notice, will torment a proud man, even to madness, and will mar all his comforts.

He noticed his own riches and honours, the number of his family, and the high posts to which he was advanced; yet all this avails him nothing, as long as Mordecai is unchanged! Those disposed to be uneasy, will never want something to be uneasy at. Such are proud men; though they have *much* to their mind, if they have not *all* to their mind, it is as nothing to them. Haman complained as if he had been sunk into the lowest degree of poverty and disgrace. Vanity and vexation are the summary of all earthly things. All avails nothing while one thing is wanting, and another is wrong. Prosperity increases arrogance, and stirs up opposition.

Haman's wife and his friends advise him to the speedy execution of Mordecai. He has the gallows made, and fixed immediately. It must be very high, to make him a spectacle to every one that passed by; and it must be before Haman's door, that he might feed his eyes with the sight. For gaining his point, they advise him to go early in the morning to the king, and to get an order from him for hanging Mordecai; which, they doubted not, would be readily granted to the king's favourite, and who had so easily obtained an edict for the destruction of the whole nation of the jews. There needed no feigned suggestion; it was enough if he let the king know that Mordecai, in contempt of the royal command, refused to reverence him. Now we leave Haman to go to rest, pleased with the thoughts of seeing Mordecai hanged the next day, and then going merrily to the banquet, not dreaming of being the person to suffer on his own gallows. May we seek happiness in the favour of God, in peace of conscience, in dominion over our own spirits; and in that humble, holy love which is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, behaveth not unseemly, seeketh not her own, rejoiceth not in iniquity, and never faileth, but shall be perfected in the happiness of heaven.

Learn that God alone can satisfy your desires, while the whole creation could not fill or content your souls, but would

leave an aching void without him. Many call the proud happy, who display pomp and magnificence; but this is a mistaken estimate. Many poor cottagers experience far less uneasiness than the rich, with all their fancied advantages around them.—(60.)

Habakkuk, Paul, and other good men, could be happy in the want of earthly enjoyments, for God was the portion of their inheritance; in him they had what a thousand worlds could not give. But those who know not God the Father, and the Son Jesus Christ, in whom is the Light and Life of men, know not the way of peace. Whatever they have, they want the one thing needful, without which all is vanity and vexation of spirit. The believer in Christ must be rich in the midst of poverty; for he possesses gold tried in the fire. The man who knows not Christ, is poor though he be rich, because he is utterly destitute of what alone constitutes true riches.—(46.)

CHAPTER VI.

Ver. 1—3. *The providence of God recommends Mordecai to the king's favour.*

The providence of God superintends the minutest concerns of men. Actions which are the result of caprice, and appear unaccountable, fall in with his wise and gracious purposes. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without him. Let us trace the steps which Providence took toward the advancement of Mordecai.

On that night the king could not sleep. On what night? The night preceding the decisive day on which Esther was to present her petition; and the morning when Haman had a petition of a very opposite kind to present to the king.—(46.)

He could not sleep when Providence had a design to serve in keeping him waking. We read of no indisposition that might break his sleep, but God, whose gift sleep is, withheld it from him. He that commanded 127 provinces could not command one hour's sleep!

When he could not sleep, he called to have the book of records, of his reign, read to him. God put it into his heart to call for them, rather than for things more likely to compose him to rest. When men do that which is unaccountable, we know not what God intends by it. King David, when he could not sleep, would have remembered God, and meditated

upon him, Psa. 63. 6; and if he would have had any book read to him, it would have been his bible; for in that law did he meditate day and night. Among other things, it was found written, that Mordecai had discovered a plot against the life of the king. The king inquired what honour and dignity had been given to Mordecai for this. He knew not whether Mordecai was preferred or not, till his servants informed him. High spirits take pride in being careless about those below them, and ignorant of their state. The great God takes cognizance of the meanest of his servants.

1. Among the persians, the chronicles were written in verse, and were generally the work of the most eminent poets. Even in England, as well as in other countries, our ancestors had poetic chronicles.—*Greenfield.*

Ver. 4—11. *Haman, unawares, gives counsel to honour Mordecai.*

Haman thinks that he has the fairest opportunity he could wish for, to solicit against Mordecai; but the king's heart is as full as his, and the king asks Haman, how he should express his favour to one whom he had marked for a favourite. No one deserves it so well as I, thinks Haman, nor stands so fair for it. See how men's pride deceives them. The deceitfulness of our own hearts appears in nothing so much as in the conceit we have of ourselves and our own performances; against which we should therefore constantly watch and pray. He thought the king loved and valued no one but himself, but he was deceived. We should suspect that the esteem which others profess for us, is not so great as it seems to be, that we may not think too well of ourselves, nor too much confide in others.

Haman thinks he is carving out honour for himself, and therefore does it very liberally. Nay, he does it presumptuously, prescribing honours too great to be conferred upon any subject. His excessive vanity, ambition, presumption, and ostentation, are shown by the honours he desired for himself. Before honour is humility, and a haughty spirit before a fall. How he is thunderstruck, when the king bids him do this honour to Mordecai the jew, the very man he hated above all men, whose ruin he was now designing! Now it is to no purpose to think of moving any thing to the king against Mordecai, when he is the man whom the king delights to honour. Haman dares not dispute, nor so much as seem to dislike the

king's order. Upon *this* account, it was agreeable to Mordecai; it indicated the king's favour, and gave hope that Esther would prevail for reversing the edict against the jews.

The honour which the Father delights to confer upon his beloved Son, is a pledge of the security and salvation of all whom he represents, who commit their cause to his hand. Their bitterest enemies shall be constrained to help forward and witness their exaltation, and to perceive how it shall be done to the man whom the Lord delighteth to honour; how much their eternal weight of glory shall exceed the worthless transient honours of the world. The sight shall increase the anguish of those who seek their destruction.

Ver. 12—14. *Haman's friends tell him of his danger.*

Observe how little Mordecai was puffed up with his honours; he returned to his place and the duty of it immediately. Honour is well bestowed on those that will not think themselves above their business. But Haman could not bear it. What harm had it done him? Was it not what he himself proposed to be done by one of the king's most noble princes? Why then should he grudge to do it himself? But that will break a proud man's heart, which would not break a humble man's sleep. His doom was, out of this event, read him by his wife and his friends.

"If Mordecai be of the seed of the jews." Why do they lay so much stress upon the stock from which Mordecai sprung? It plainly appears that the dispensations of Divine Providence were so far known as to assure them the interests of that nation were watched over in a peculiar manner. They plainly confessed that the jews scattered through the nations were special objects of the Divine care. The wonders done in Babylon were known, and impressed all considerate persons with high sentiments concerning the God of Israel. They saw that the same God who had preserved Daniel and his companions, watched over Mordecai; and they concluded that Haman would fall before his vengeance.—(46.)

Miserable comforters are they all; they did not advise him to repent, but foretell his destiny as fatal and unavoidable. They foresee that Haman would be disappointed in his enterprise against the jews, and that he himself would be destroyed. He was now seasonably sent

for to the banquet that Esther had prepared. The wisdom of God is seen in timing the means of his church's deliverance, so as to manifest his own glory.

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1—6. *Esther, making suit for herself and her people, accuses Haman.*

While the king repeatedly urged Esther to make her request, though it were to the half of his kingdom, she, in the most simple and affecting manner, besought him, that her own life might be spared, and the lives of her people! Without complaining of his conduct, she stated that she and her people had been sold as sheep for the slaughter, alluding to the money Haman had offered to pay for their destruction. If the love of life inspires such earnest and pathetic pleadings with those that can only kill the body, how fervent and earnest should our prayers be to Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell! How affectionately should we pray for the eternal salvation of our relatives, friends, and all around us!

When we supplicate great men, we must be cautious not to give them offence; even just complaints must often be suppressed. But when we approach the King of kings with reverence, we cannot ask or expect too much. Though nothing but wrath be our due, he is able and willing to do exceeding abundantly, even beyond all we can ask or think.

Even a stranger, a criminal, shall be permitted to petition for his life; but that a friend, a wife, should have occasion to present such a petition, was very affecting. She refers to the words of the decree, ch. 3. 13, which aimed at their destruction; this would touch the king's heart. Ahasuerus did not recollect his edict against the jews, or was not aware of its consequences; therefore he could not conceive how any one could be so daring as to attempt the life of his queen, as well as the destruction of his subjects. Esther plainly charged Haman with it. It was time for him to fear; the surprising operations of Providence against him, that same morning, could not but increase his alarm.

Ver. 7—10. *Haman hanged on his own gallows.*

The king retired in anger, probably vexed at himself, that he should doom a guiltless nation to destruction, and his own queen among the rest, upon the base

suggestions of a self-seeking man, without examining the truth of his allegations. They that do things with self-will, reflect upon them afterward with self-reproach. Also he was vexed at Haman whom he had laid in his bosom, that he should be such a villain as to draw him to so wicked a measure. When we are angry, we should pause before we come to any resolution, as those that have a rule over their own spirits, and are governed by reason.

How contemptible Haman looks, when he stands up first, and then falls down at Esther's feet, to beg she would save his life, and take all he had! They that are most haughty, insolent, and imperious, when in power and prosperity, commonly are the most abject and poor-spirited, when the wheel turns upon them. The day is coming when those that hate and persecute God's chosen ones, would gladly be beholden to them.

The king returns yet more exasperated against Haman. Those about him were ready to be the instruments of his wrath. The courtiers that adored Haman when he was rising, are glad of an occasion to run him down; so little sure can proud men be of the interest they think they have. As soon as the king spake, they covered Haman's face, as a condemned man, not worthy to see the king, or to be seen by him; they marked him for execution. One that had been lately sent to Haman's house to fetch him to the banquet, informed the king of the gallows prepared for Mordecai. Now that Mordecai is the favourite, the chamberlain applauds him; and, Haman being in disgrace, every thing is taken notice of, that might incense the king against him. The king ordered that Haman should be hanged upon his own gallows, which was done. See here, 1. Pride brought down. He that expected every one to do him reverence, is made an ignominious spectacle to the world. God resists the proud; and those whom he resists, will find him irresistible. 2. Persecution punished. Haman's enmity to God's church was his most provoking crime; for that the God to whom vengeance belongs, here reckons with him, according to the wickedness of his endeavours. 3. Mischief returned upon the person that contrived it; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Haman is justly hanged on the gallows he had unjustly prepared for

Mordecai. The enemies of God's church have often been thus taken in their own craftiness. The Lord is known by such judgments. See Prov. 11. 8; 21. 18.

Then was the king's wrath pacified, and not till then. God saith of wicked men, Ezek. 5. 13, I will cause my fury to rest upon them, and I will be comforted. At the day of judgment, when the whole wickedness of the ungodly shall be discovered, and the justice of God displayed in their everlasting punishment, all the righteous shall joyfully exclaim, So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord; but they who love him shall shine forth, as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father. Who pities Haman hanged on his own gallows? who does not rather rejoice in the Divine righteousness displayed in the destruction which his own art brought upon him? Let the workers of iniquity tremble, turn to the Lord, and seek pardon through the blood of Jesus. Saul of Tarsus was a persecutor, who sought the utter destruction of the Israel of God; yet he obtained mercy, and the grace of our Lord was abundant to him. But the Lord shall wound the head of the wicked, the hairy scalp of him that goeth on still in his trespasses, Psal. 68. 21.—(46.)

CHAPTER VIII.

Ver. 1, 2. *Mordecai is advanced.*

Haman was hanged as a traitor, his estate was forfeited, and the king gave it all to Esther. Thus is the wealth of the sinner laid up for the just; and the innocent divides the silver. What Haman would have done mischief with, Esther will do good with; and estates are to be valued as they are used. Mordecai is now owned as the queen's relation. All the trust the king had reposed in Haman, he transferred to Mordecai: a happy change he made, and so, no doubt, he and his people found it. The queen set Mordecai over the house of Haman. See the vanity of laying up treasure upon earth; he that heapeth up riches, knoweth not who shall gather them. With what little pleasure, nay, with what constant vexation, would Haman have looked upon his estate, if he could have foreseen that Mordecai, the man he hated above all men in the world, should have rule over all that wherein he had laboured! It is our interest to make sure of those riches which will not be left behind, but which will go with us to another world.

Ver. 3—14. *Esther makes suit for the jews—Permission granted them to defend themselves.*

Haman, the chief enemy of the jews, was hanged, Mordecai and Esther, their chief friends, were sufficiently protected; but there were many that hated the jews, and to their rage and malice all the rest of that people lay exposed; for the edict against them was still in force. The queen came, a second time, uncalled into the king's presence, and was, as before, encouraged to present her petition, by the king's holding out the golden sceptre to her. This petition Esther presents with much affection. It was time to be earnest, when the church of God lay at stake. Let none be unwilling to stoop, none be unwilling to weep, when thereby they may do any service to God's church and people. Esther, though safe herself, fell down, and begged with tears for the deliverance of her people. She expressed it with great submission: when we have the utmost reason and justice on our side, it becomes us to speak to our superiors with humility and respect, and not to talk like demandants, when we are supplicants. Esther, a queen, owns her poor kindred, and speaks of them with a very tender concern. Now it was, that she mingled her tears with her words, that she wept and made supplication. We read of no tears when she begged for her own life, but now that she was sure of that, she wept for her people. Tears of pity and tenderness are the most Christ-like.

According to the constitution of the persian government, no law or decree, when once it had passed the royal assent, could be repealed or recalled, Dan. 6. 15. This is so far from bespeaking the wisdom and honour of the medes and persians, that really it bespeaks their pride and folly, and, consequently, their shame. This savours of that old presumption which ruined us all, We will be as gods! It is God's prerogative not to repent, and to say what can never be altered or unsaid. Yet an expedient was found, by another decree, to authorize the jews to stand upon their defence, and destroy the assailants. The king would do the utmost he could to protect them. The decree was published in the respective languages of all the provinces. Shall the subjects of an earthly prince have his decrees in a language they understand? And shall God's oracles and laws be locked up from his

servants in an unknown tongue? Great expedition was used in dispersing this decree. It was not a time to trifle, when so many lives were in danger.

Ver. 15—17. *Mordecai honoured—The joy of the jews.*

It was but a short time since that we had Mordecai in sackcloth, and all the jews in sorrow; but here is a blessed change. Mordecai's robes were rich. These things are not worth notice but as they were marks of the king's favour, and that the fruit of God's favour to his church. It is well with a land, when ensigns of dignity are made the ornaments of serious piety. The jews now had light and gladness, joy and honour, a feast and a good day. God's people sometimes are made to sow in tears, that they may reap in so much the more joy. The suddenness and strangeness of the turn of affairs in their favour, added much to their joy, Psa. 126. 1, 2.

One good effect was, that many people of the land became jews, renounced idolatry, and worshipped the true God only. Haman thought to extirpate the jews, but, in the issue, their numbers are greatly increased, and many added to the church. They thought them great, and those happy that were among them; and therefore they came over to them, as was foretold, Zech. 8. 23. When the church prospers, and is smiled upon, many will come in to it, that will be shy of it when in trouble. When believers have rest, and walk in the fear of the Lord, and the comfort of the Holy Ghost, they will be multiplied. We may suppose that some were true converts, others only formal professors, as usual in such seasons. But the attempts of Satan to destroy the church uniformly tend to increase the number of true christians. May the Lord speedily destroy the enemies to his sanctuary! may the princes of the earth become nursing fathers to his church! may his people have light and joy upon earth, anticipating the joy and gladness of heaven! may Jesus himself reign, by the power of his grace, wherever the sun diffuses his beams, and fill the earth with peace and righteousness!

CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 1—19. *The successful resistance of the jews against their enemies.*

The enemies of the jews hoped, notwithstanding the latter edict, to have power over them by the former, and as-

saulted them accordingly. If they had attempted nothing against the people of God they would not themselves have suffered. The jews were the conquerors; they stood upon their defence, offering violence to none. If they had not had an edict to warrant them, they durst not have done it, but, being so supported, they strove lawfully. Had they acted separately, each family apart, they had been an easy prey to their enemies; but, acting in concert, and gathering together in their cities, they strengthened one another.

Let us learn from their example to stand fast in one spirit, and with one mind, striving together against the enemies of our souls, who endeavour to rob us of our faith, more precious than our lives. The church is terrible, like an army with banners, when her rulers and members are closely united under the Captain of salvation to oppose her enemies.—(46.)

Under the influence of Mordecai, all the officers of the king conformed themselves to the latter edict, and helped the jews. They all saw it their interest to help Mordecai's friends. Great men may, by their influence, do much good; many that fear not God, will stand in awe of them. God struck all people with a fear of them, so that though they assaulted them, yet their hearts failed them when they came to engage. The jews slew in the city Shushan 500 men, and the ten sons of Haman. On the 14th day they slew in Shushan 300 more. The jews in the country slew no more of their enemies than what were slain the 13th day, which were, among all the provinces, 75,000. They did it in their own just and necessary defence; authorized by the law of self-preservation, as well as by the king's decree. In these several executions, it is noticed, that on the prey they laid not their hand. The jews, to the honour of their religion, evidenced a contempt of worldly wealth, that they might make it appear that they aimed at nothing except their own preservation. Their commission empowered them to destroy the families of their enemies, ch. 8. 11. But they slew none except those in arms. In every case the people of God should manifest humanity and disinterestedness, frequently refusing advantages which might legally be obtained.

The jews celebrated their festival the day after they had finished their work.

When we have received signal mercies from God, we ought to be speedy in making thankful returns to him, while the mercy is fresh, and the impressions of it most sensible.

Ver. 20—32. *The feast of purim to be observed in remembrance of this deliverance.*

The observance of the ancient jewish feasts is a public declaration of their present firm belief in the Old Testament scriptures. This is one of the powerful arguments of the truth of our holy religion. If the Old Testament scriptures are true, the Messiah expected by the jews is come long ago; and none but Jesus of Nazareth can be that Messiah. Thus the most determined enemies of Jesus gave a decided though indirect testimony, that He is the Son of God, by attesting the truth and Divine authority of those ancient scriptures that testify of him.—(46.)

Here is the institution of the feast of purim, which the jews observe even to this day. The festival was appointed by authority, yet under the direction of the Spirit of God. It was evidently right to perpetuate the memory of so great a deliverance. These days were appointed to be spent in feasting and joy, in hospitality and liberality to the poor. In after-ages the jews have assembled on these days in their synagogues, to read over this book of Esther, and to perform other religious worship; but the feast has long since degenerated into a season of excess.

Mordecai wrote this history as it is supposed, and sent it with his letters into all the provinces. The contrast between this book and that of Nehemiah, is very remarkable. The one is interspersed with pious reflections, while the other makes no explicit mention of God and religion. Nehemiah wrote at Jerusalem; Mordecai wrote at Shushan the palace, where policy reigned more than piety. Even those that have the root of the matter in them, are apt to lose the savour of religion, when they converse wholly with those that have little religion.

It was called the feast of purim, from pur, a persian word, which signifies a lot, because Haman had by lot determined this to be the time of the jews' destruction, while the Lord, at whose disposal the lot is, had determined it to be the time of their triumph. The name of this festival would remind them of the sovereign dominion of the God of Israel, who served his own purposes by the supersti-

tions of the heathen, Isa. 44. 25; 47. 13. In reviewing our mercies, we should advert to previous fears and distresses; what danger and destruction we have escaped, and with what circumstances our deliverances have been attended. When our mercies are personal, we should not by forgetfulness lose the comfort of them, or withhold from the Lord the glory due to his name. But let not holy joy in God be supplanted by sensual indulgence and carnal mirth. Professed christians often behave like the followers of heathen deities, or imitate the worshippers of the golden calf; they sit down to eat and drink, and rise up to play. Nothing more disgraces religion and stupifies the conscience than such abuses. May the Lord teach us to rejoice with that holy joy which anticipates and prepares for the blessedness of heaven.

These were to be days of sending portions one to another. Their common danger and their common deliverance would open their hearts to mutual kindness. How much more ought our common salvation by Christ, from our general misery, to bind the hearts of christians one to another! We were all involved in guilt and ruin by sin, and the same sin was the source of misery to us all. We are all redeemed by the same precious blood; we are all saved by the same almighty arm. Let our common joy in Christ's salvation overflow in mutual love. If we are penetrated with the love of Christ, shall we not love all those who are the objects of the same exceeding riches of grace? Every expression of Divine goodness to ourselves is a new obligation laid on us to do good, to those especially who most need our bounty. Above all, the redemption by Christ binds us to be merciful, 2 Cor. 8. 9.—(46.)

CHAPTER X.

Ahasuerus's greatness—Mordecai's advancement.

King Ahasuerus was great and powerful. Many instances of the grandeur of Ahasuerus might have been given; but the sacred history is confined to the jews, and relates the history of other nations only as they fell in with their affairs. They were written in the persian chronicles, which are long since lost and buried in oblivion, while the sacred writings live in honour, and will live till time shall be no more. The concerns of the despised

worshippers of the Lord are deemed more important by the Spirit of inspiration than the exploits of the most illustrious monarch on earth.

Mordecai was truly great, and his greatness gave him opportunity of doing the more good. When the king advanced him, he did not disown his people the jews. Still he wrote himself, Mordecai the jew, and, no doubt, adhered to the true religion. He did not seek his own wealth, and the raising an estate for himself and his family; but he consulted the welfare of his people, and made it his business to advance that. Thus making himself acceptable by humility and beneficence, he was universally accepted, and gained the good word of all his brethren.

Few have it in their power to be such benefactors as Mordecai; but all have it in their power to do hurt, and who has it not in his power to do some good? We are not required to do what is not in our power, or competent to our station; but all are bound to live under the influence of the tempers displayed in the saints, whose examples are recorded in the bible. They obtained their good report through faith, which animated them in all their undertakings. If we live by the faith of

Christ, we shall be active according to the ability and opportunities he gives us, in promoting his glory and the best interests of men. Fervent charity operated in Mordecai. If our faith be genuine, it will work by love.—(46.)

From the history before us we may derive instruction and encouragement for all sincere members of God's church. If you belong to it, marvel not that there are those who seek your ruin. Wait in faith and prayer, and the final issue will be safe and glorious; your salvation is sure through our Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever then are your present difficulties, rejoice in expectation of future triumph. Say, In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that hath loved us, Rom. 8. 37.—(60.)

The rest of the chapters of the book of Esther, contained in the Apocrypha, which are found neither in the hebrew nor in the chaldee, were originally written in greek, whence they were translated into latin, and formed part of the italic or old latin version in use before the time of Jerome, but were rejected by him because he confined himself to the hebrew scriptures. They are evidently the production of an hellenistic jew, and are considered by Jerome and Grotius as a fiction, which was annexed to the canonical book of Esther by way of embellishment.—*T. H. Horne.*

PRINCIPAL DATES OF EZRA, NEHEMIAH, AND ESTHER.

	B. C.		B. C.
Cyrus proclaims liberty to the jews . . .	536	Ezra sent to govern Judea . . .	457
The foundation of the temple laid . . .	534	Haman plots the destruction of the jews . .	453
The building of the temple hindered . . .	533	Nehemiah sent to govern Judea, and he re-	
Decree of Artaxerxes (Smerdis the magian)		builds the walls of Jerusalem . . .	445
forbidding the building of the temple . .	522	He goes back to the persian court, and ob-	
The jews, excited by the prophets, proceed .	520	tains leave to return to Jerusalem . . .	444
The samaritans again interfere, but are re-		About this time Ezra is supposed to have	
strained by the decree of Darius . . .	519	set forth the sacred canon.	
The temple finished . . .	515	Nehemiah returns to the persian court . .	433
Ahasuerus (Artaxerxes Longimanus) stops		Nehemiah is again sent back to Jerusalem,	
the building of Jerusalem . . .	463	and reforms abuses . . .	424
Esther made queen . . .	458		

ON THE VARIATIONS IN THE HISTORICAL BOOKS OF SCRIPTURE.

The principal and most numerous variations in the historical books, are between some parts of 2 Samuel and Kings and Chronicles; they chiefly relate to numbers, dates, names, and genealogies. They have been very minutely examined and satisfactorily accounted for by various commentators. To enter fully into particulars, in the present work, is impossible; those of most importance have been noticed in their respective places, and for the rest it may be remarked, that they

chiefly arise from the following sources:—The different designs which the different narratives have in view. That the same place or person often has more than one name, and that several places and persons have the same name. That differences in names are often caused by mistakes in copying, frequently arising from the great similarity in form among several hebrew letters. Events are not always related in the order in which they occurred. Whole or round numbers are sometimes put for

the precise quantity. The hebrews used the letters of their alphabet to denote numbers, several of which were very nearly the same in form, and might easily be mistaken for each other, though they denoted very different numbers. Thus 𐤁 for 𐤂 (or 2 for 20) 𐤄 for 𐤅 (or 4 for 200.)

An english reader may suppose that errors would often occur, if in his language c meant 5 and e 300, or if the omission of the dot from an i made 60 into 6. In the years of the reigns of the kings, the difference sometimes arises from sons being admitted as partners with their fathers in the throne, as the beginning of the reign sometimes is reckoned from one event, and sometimes from the other. It may be further remarked, that the books of Chronicles are supplementary to those of Kings; they are termed in the greek *Paraleipomena*, or things omitted. The language also was partly changed after the captivity, and new names given to many places and things. In addition to the above reasons, one other important cause of variation should be added—that the translators have sometimes mistaken the meaning of words; have rendered the same word differently; and in names have given the same letters different sounds in english.

It may be further remarked, in reference to some of the numbers mentioned, that in eastern nations, when an absolute

monarch pleases, the whole population able to bear arms, are obliged to come forth to act in military service. Also, that in addition to the men who are actually efficient soldiers, the followers of an eastern camp frequently swell the number of an army to many times its effective force.

And let the reader never forget that all the errors, or seeming differences, do not affect a single doctrinal statement, or weaken the force of a single scriptural truth; while the strictness with which the errors have, in some instances, been retained, strongly shows the scrupulous fidelity with which the sacred text has been preserved from alterations. But it is satisfactory that every passage in a book to which mankind are indebted for their knowledge of the revealed word of God, should be cleared from the cavils of unbelievers. The particulars above mentioned furnish a general answer, and any one who wishes to obtain information upon particular texts, will find it among the extensive labours of those who have devoted their time and talents to the elucidation of scripture. The english reader may especially be referred to the writings of *T. H. Horne*, as exceedingly valuable to all who have not time or opportunity themselves to pursue the work of critical investigation, and who yet wish to obtain satisfactory information on the principal passages to which these observations refer.

THE STATE OF THE JEWS AFTER THE BABYLONISH CAPTIVITY.

When we contemplate the provocations wherewith Judah provoked the Lord to anger, before the captivity in Babylon, as described in the history of her latter kings, we find occasion to admire the patience and long-suffering, the compassion and mercy of God towards his people, not only in the gradual manner in which the judgment was executed, but also in the professed object of that judgment, and in the assurance that it should accomplish its intended and gracious end. Such an assurance could only be given in consequence of a Divine purpose to effect it, by the influence of the Holy Spirit. Past afflictions, though neither few nor small, had failed to produce any vital and effectual reformation; and though that which was threatened, was more severe than any which preceded it, yet no certainty of its success could have existed, had not promises of Divine interposition been added.

The master sin, both of Israel and Judah, was idolatry, which was a breach of the national covenant between God and them, and is illustrated in the prophets by allusions to a violation of the marriage vow. They chose to themselves other lords, and reaped the awful consequences of the choice they made. But this enormous evil, to which the jews had discovered a fatal proneness for many ages, was effectually cured by the captivity in Babylon. It is not indeed to be supposed, that all the captives who there learned the folly of worshipping idols, became spiritual worshippers of Jehovah. But the nation never was again guilty of the grievous national provocation which had been the chief cause of their heavy calamity. And though all who were reformed were not converted, the season of affliction proved a season of special grace. Many of the oppressed

captives, through the promised influence of the Holy Spirit, sought the Lord in their trouble, and he was gracious unto them. The testimony of their prophets, who exhorted and encouraged them, proves there was a great revival of vital godliness among them; and Psalm 137. discovers their feelings in regard to their religious privations, and the privileges they had forfeited and lost by their sins. The exhortations and examples of such men as Ezekiel and Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, could not have been without effect, and the promises before alluded to, in which assurance is given that Divine influence should accompany the outward visitation of Providence, must have been fulfilled. The miraculous appearances on their behalf also must have struck their heathen oppressors with amazement, and probably in some instances produced a conversion of heart.

Whatever was the spiritual state of the Jewish captives during their abode in Babylon, or the effect produced among their idolatrous oppressors by their residence among them, it is certain that on their restoration to their own land, there was much of the vitality of religion among them. Many circumstances evince, that under the influence of the Holy Spirit, their hearts were brought back to Him who had chastened them for their good; for his grace only could produce such effects. But towards the close of the viceroyship of Nehemiah, the ardour of religious feeling and conduct began again to wane. This especially appears from Malachi, the last of the prophets. Zeal abated, and indifference followed. A great declension took place, till another persecution, under Antiochus Epiphanes, by the agency of Divine grace, was made the means of rekindling for a short time the almost extinguished spark of spiritual life. In that history we lose the infallible guide, the inspired scriptures, and must be content with the uninspired testimony in the apocryphal book of the Maccabees, and the narrative of Josephus, which are confirmed, in the great outline of the facts they state, by credible heathen authorities. But it would be irrelevant here to enter on the history of that period.

What is the inference to be drawn from the history of the Jewish nation? It clearly shows that godliness is in its origin the effect of Divine influence; and that influence which implants must also

preserve it. And the history of the church is the history of every individual Christian. Every awakened mind is conscious of the same natural tendency to depart from the living God, which may be traced through the Jewish history. The portrait of Israel as delineated in the 78th Psalm, is the portrait of man in every age: and the contrast there produced, between Israel's ingratitude, and the Divine compassion, is verified through the whole history of the church. If the influence of God's Holy Spirit be obstructed in its operations by the unfaithfulness of its recipient, faith languishes, hope droops, love becomes cold, and were that influence for a moment to be wholly suspended, the spark of spiritual life would expire. The constant prayer of every conscious sinner is that of David, "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

The preceding observations are from *Biddulph*, the following are from *Taylor*:

Although after the Babylonish captivity, the Jews no more lapsed into idolatry, but remained steady in the acknowledgment and worship of the one living and true God, yet even then they fell into new ways of perverting religion, and the wise and holy intentions of the Divine law:—1. By laying all the stress on the *external* and *less momentous* parts of it, while they neglected the *weighty* and *substantial*, true holiness of heart and life. Thus they placed religion in *mere profession*, or in the zealous observance of rites and ceremonies, instead of real piety, truth, purity, and goodness. 2. By speculating and commenting upon the Divine commands and institutions, till their force was quite enervated, and they were refined into a sense that allowed a slight regard, instead of sincere obedience. 3. By confirming and establishing the two former methods of corrupting religion by tradition, and the authority of learned rabbins, pretending that there was a system of religious rules delivered by word of mouth from Moses, explanatory of the written law, known only to those rabbins; to whose judgment, therefore, and decision, all the people were to submit.

This, in time, in the space of about 220 years, became the general state of religion among the Jews, after they had discarded idolatry; and this prevailed among them for some ages, nearly 300 years, before the coming of the Messiah; but they still

continued steadfast in the outward worship of the true God, and thus were prepared to receive the Messiah; so that their guilt was highly aggravated, when they rejected Him and His instructions.

For many ages the jews had been well known in the eastern empire, among the assyrians, chaldeans, medes, and persians; but, till the time of Alexander the great, they had no communication with the greeks. About B. C. 332, Alexander built Alexandria, in Egypt; and, to people his new city, removed thither many jews, allowing them the use of their laws and religion, and the same liberties with the macedonians themselves. The macedonians, who spake the greek language, and other greeks, were the principal inhabitants of Alexandria; from them the jews learned to speak greek, which was the common language of the city, and which soon became the native language of the jews that lived there, who, on that account, were called hellenists, or greek jews, mentioned Acts 6. 1; 9. 29; 11. 20. These greek jews had synagogues in Alexandria; and for their benefit the Five Books of Moses, which alone at first were publicly read, were translated into greek, (by whom is uncertain,) and were read in their synagogues every sabbath day; and in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, about 168 years before Christ, the writings of the prophets also were translated into greek for the use of the alexandrian jews.

This translation contributed much to spread the knowledge of true religion among the western parts of the world, from the universal prevalence of the greek language and the dispersion of the jews. As for the jews, their synagogues and worship were, after Alexander's death, diffused almost every where among the nations. Ptolemy, one of Alexander's successors, having reduced Jerusalem, and all Judea, about 320 years before Christ, carried 100,000 jews into Egypt, and there raised considerable numbers of them to places of trust and power; and several of them he placed in Cyrene and Libya. Seleucus, another of Alexander's successors, about 300 years before Christ, built Antioch in Cilicia, and many other cities, and some of the capital cities in the Greater and Lesser Asia, in all of which he planted the jews, giving them equal privileges and immunities with the greeks and macedonians, especially at Antioch

in Syria, where they settled in great numbers, and became almost as considerable a part of that city as they were at Alexandria. Thus the knowledge of the true God, who never leaves himself without a witness, was communicated and preserved among the gentiles, now that miracle and prophecy had ceased among the jews. And thus a general expectation of the Messiah was communicated throughout the world, by the jewish prophecies and expectations being made known among the nations. On that memorable day of pentecost, Acts 2. 5, 9—11, were assembled in Jerusalem *jews*, devout men, out of every nation under heaven, namely, parthians, medes, and persians, of the province of Elymais, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Cyrene in Libya, and Rome, cretes, and arabs, who were all either natural jews, or devout men, that is, proselytes to the jewish religion. And in every city of the roman empire, where Paul preached, he found a body of his countrymen, the jews, except in Athens, which was at that time, probably, a town of no considerable trade; which shows that the jews and their synagogues, at the time of our Lord's appearance, were providentially scattered over all the roman empire.

About the time that Alexander built Alexandria in Egypt, the use of the papyrus for writing was found out in that country. This invention contributed to the increase of books and the advancement of learning, for some ages before the coming of our Lord. Add to all this, that the world, after many changes and revolutions, was, by God's all-ruling wisdom, thrown into that form of civil affairs which best suited with the great intended alteration. Thus a variety of circumstances were combined together by Divine Providence, making this the "fulness of time," Gal. 4. 4, or the fittest juncture for God to reveal Himself to the gentiles.

J. Edwards says,

God by the gradual decline of the jewish state and church from Solomon's time, prepared the way for the coming of Christ.

1. The decline of the glory of the legal dispensation made way for the more glorious dispensation of the gospel. The ancient dispensation, even such as it was in Solomon's time, had no glory when compared with the spiritual dispensation introduced by Christ. Its externals are

called by the apostle weak and beggarly elements, Gal. 4. 9. It was fit these should be diminished as Christ approached.

2. This gradual decline also tended to prepare for Christ's coming, as it displayed the glory of God's power in the great effects of his redemption. The people in Solomon's time were too many, and too mighty, and too glorious for Christ; therefore he diminished them, and with a small handful of disciples he conquered the world. Thus high things were brought down, that Christ might be exalted.

3. This prepared the way for Christ's coming, as it made the salvation of those jews that were saved by him more conspicuous. Though the greater part of the nation of the jews was rejected, and the gentiles called in their room, yet there were many thousands of the jews saved by Christ after his resurrection, Acts 21. 20. Their being taken from so low a state, under temporal calamity in their bondage

to the romans, and from a state of great superstition and wickedness, made their redemption the more visibly glorious.

All that is recorded shows us how great a person Jesus Christ is, and how great an errand he came into the world upon, seeing there was so much done to prepare the way for his coming. God had done nothing but prepare the way for his coming through all ages. How great a Person then must HE be, for whose coming into the world, the great God of heaven and earth, the Governor of all things, spent 4000 years in preparing the way, causing all the revolutions and changes in the habitable world, from generation to generation, to be subservient to this great design. Surely this Saviour must be some very great and extraordinary Person, and a great work it must needs be that he is come about! The Person was THE SON OF GOD, and the work he came to accomplish was the redemption of man!

A BRIEF VIEW OF THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE CLOSE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT,
AND THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

An account of the general history of the period which intervened between the closing of the historical books of the Old Testament, and the commencement of the New, is a necessary accompaniment to every publication designed to be explanatory of the holy scriptures, and should not be omitted in the present work. A brief sketch only can be attempted—the full details must be sought from the ample stores of *Prideaux*, or from the still wider range afforded by the pages of general history. And we may further remark, with *J. Edwards*, that “although we have no account of a great part of this period in scripture history, yet the events of it are more the subject of scripture prophecy, than any of the preceding periods.—Most of the remarkable prophecies in the book of Daniel, and most of those in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, against Babylon, Tyre, Egypt, and many other nations, were fulfilled in this period.—We have undoubted accounts in profane history of the principal events; accounts that wonderfully agree with the many prophecies that relate to those times.”

The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, and the city repeopled by Nehemiah, during the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus, who died B. C. 424. He was suc-

ceeded by his son, Xerxes II. who was slain by his brother Sogdeanus, who was put to death by Ochus, another son of Artaxerxes. These events took place within the space of a few months, and Ochus on succeeding to the throne took the name of Darius Nothus. During the reign of Darius it is supposed that Malachi prophesied, and Nehemiah effected his last act of reformation, although the period of his decease is uncertain. After his death Judea seems to have been made subject to the governor of the province of Syria, under whose authority the high priest exercised the local government. The Spirit of prophecy having been withdrawn, the jews were left to the guidance of their ecclesiastical and civil polity, under their own law, but subject to the persian empire.

Artaxerxes Mnemon succeeded to the throne of Persia, B. C. 405. Bagoses, the governor of Syria, appointed Joshua to supersede his brother Johanan in the high priesthood, B. C. 366. The latter resisted the appointment, and caused Joshua to be murdered in the inner court of the temple. A heavy yearly fine was in consequence exacted, till the death of Artaxerxes, B. C. 359, caused a change in the government of Syria. A revolt having taken place in Phœnicia, some of

the jews seem to have been involved therein, and Jericho was taken by Ochus the persian monarch, and many of the nation were sold as captives. Johanan, the high priest, died B. C. 341, and was succeeded by his son Jaddua. After the death of Ochus in 338, and of his son Arsaces in 336, both of whom were poisoned, Darius Codomanus was settled on the persian throne.

The period was now arrived when the persian monarchy, agreeably to the sure word of prophecy, was to be displaced by the grecian power. Alexander, king of Macedon, invaded Asia B. C. 334, and by a rapid series of astonishing victories, subdued all the countries from the shores of the Egean sea to the banks of the Indus, and from the Caspian sea to the southern ocean, and the furthest confines of Egypt. This mighty conqueror died at Babylon in 323, at the early age of thirty-two; a most impressive instance of the vanity of all earthly greatness.

A remarkable interposition in favour of the jewish nation, is recorded to have occurred during the rapid progress of this conqueror. The jews having assisted the tyrians against the grecian conqueror, immediately after the capture of that city Alexander advanced towards Jerusalem, intending to treat the inhabitants with the utmost severity. In this exigence, Jaddua with the body of the people, earnestly besought the Divine interposition in their favour. He was directed in a vision to go forth in the robes of the high priest, to meet the conqueror, accompanied by the other priests in their habits, and the people in white garments. They went in solemn procession, and waited the approach of Alexander, who, on beholding the high priest, hastened forward, and saluted him with a respect and veneration for which the attendants could not account. Parmenio, the royal favourite, inquiring the reason for this adoration, Alexander replied, that he adored not Jaddua but the God whom he served. He added, that while in Macedonia, deliberating as to his expedition against Asia, a personage, resembling the high priest, and in a similar habit, appeared to him in a dream, assuring him that God would be his guide, and would give success to his expedition. Alexander then laid aside his purposes of wrath against the jews, and entering Jerusalem, with Jaddua, in a friendly

manner, offered sacrifices to Jehovah. The high priest showed to him the prophecy of Daniel, in which his invasion and success against the persian monarch is so plainly predicted. On leaving Jerusalem, Alexander desired the jews to ask of him any favour they wished to obtain, upon which they petitioned to be allowed the free exercise of their laws and religion, and to be exempted from tribute during the sabbatical years. Their request being readily complied with, the samaritans petitioned for the like favour. These were a mixture of the ancient inhabitants of the ten tribes, with the heathens settled among them by their conquerors, increased by a number of the jews who had settled in Samaria, under Manasses the high priest, when expelled from his office about eighty years before, on account of his alliance by marriage with the idolaters. They had built a temple on mount Gerizim, and bitter enmity from that time existed between the jews and the samaritans. The privileges requested not being immediately granted, they mutinied, and slew the governor appointed by Alexander, who on his return from Egypt in the following year, where he had laid the foundations of Alexandria, and settled many jews, drove them from Samaria, placing in their stead a colony of macedonians, and giving the rest of their territories to the jews. Those samaritans who were not destroyed, retired to Shechem on mount Gerizim, which became their principal seat.

After the death of Alexander, his empire was divided into four kingdoms, under his four principal officers. Macedonia and Greece were allotted to Cassander; Thrace, Bithynia, and the north to Lysimachus; Syria, Armenia, and the eastern countries to Seleucus Nicator; Egypt, Libya, &c. to Ptolemy Lagus. Palestine, and Cœlo-Syria and Phœnicia, at first were allotted to Laomedin, but were seized by Ptolemy. The jews, however, being held by a sense of religious obligation to their oath of allegiance to the former, refused to submit. Ptolemy invaded Judea and captured Jerusalem, B. C. 320; the regard due to the observance of the sabbath being at that time understood by the jews, as precluding them from offering any resistance to their enemies on that day. Many were carried to Egypt as captives, but were treated with such kindness,

that others followed of their own accord.

Dissensions arising among Alexander's successors, Antigonus, one of his captains, obtained possession of Judea and the adjoining provinces, but subsequent to his defeat and death in 301, they were again assigned to Ptolemy. Soon after, in 292, Simon the Just, the high priest, died. He was distinguished for his wisdom and virtuous conduct, and is considered to have completed the Old Testament, as it is come down to us.

Ptolemy Philadelphus succeeded to the throne of Egypt, B. C. 284, and was a kind protector of the jewish nation. During his reign, the greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint version, is said to have been made. The importance of this work is shown in the general note on The state of the jews after the babylonish captivity.

A series of events followed, which had been predicted by Daniel, see ch. 11. Antiochus Theos having succeeded his father Antiochus Soter, the son of Seleucus, as king of Syria, a long and sanguinary war ensued between him and Ptolemy, which was ended B. C. 249, by a treaty, in which Antiochus agreed to divorce his wife Laodice, and to marry Berenice, the daughter of Ptolemy. Two years after, on the death of the egyptian monarch, Antiochus divorced Berenice and recalled Laodice, who, fearful of another change, poisoned her husband, put Berenice to death, and placed her son Callinichus on the throne. Ptolemy Euergetes, in revenge for his sister's death, slew Laodice, and subdued Syria. On his return to Egypt, he passed through Judea, and there offered sacrifices of thanksgiving at Jerusalem. The jews now became subject to Ptolemy, and had to pay a tribute of twenty talents, which being withheld by an avaricious high priest, Onias II., a severe punishment would have been inflicted upon the nation, had not the danger been averted by the able and prudent conduct of Joseph, the nephew of Onias, who retained the favour of the egyptian monarchs by his integrity and activity in collecting the revenues of the province.

Ptolemy Euergetes died in 221, when a war broke out between his successor, Ptolemy Philopater, and Antiochus, called the Great, then king of Syria, who seized the province of Cœlo-Syria. Phi-

lopater regained the provinces he had lost, defeating Antiochus at Raphia. On his return, he offered sacrifices at Jerusalem; but, being refused permission to enter the holy of holies, he was much enraged against the jewish people. Upon his arrival at Alexandria, he deprived that nation of their privileges, and collecting many jews together, he exposed them to be devoured by wild beasts in the public amphitheatre: but the ferocious animals turned upon the spectators, and destroyed numbers of them instead of the intended victims.

After the death of Philopater, in 204, Antiochus invaded the out provinces of Egypt. Palestine was alternately possessed by each power, and at last willingly submitted to Antiochus, who confirmed the national privileges of the jews, as granted by Alexander. Subsequently he restored Judea to Egypt, in dowry with his daughter, upon condition that the revenues should be divided between the two powers. After an unsuccessful war with the romans, to whom he was obliged to pay a large sum as the price of peace, Antiochus was slain by the people of Elymais, B. C. 187, in an attempt to rob their temple of its treasures. Seleucus Philopater succeeded his father as king of Syria, but was little more than a raiser of taxes all his days, (Dan. 11. 20,) to defray the roman tribute. Being informed that vast treasures were deposited in the temple at Jerusalem, he sent his treasurer to seize them, but on attempting to enter the temple, Josephus and the writer of the second book of Maccabees relate, he was panic-struck by a vision, and withdrew without accomplishing his object.

Seleucus was murdered B. C. 176 by his treasurer, Heliodorus, who attempted to usurp the throne. Another party inclined for Ptolemy Philometer, king of Egypt, both agreeing not to give to Antiochus, the brother of Seleucus, the honour of the kingdom, Dan. 11. 21. But Antiochus applied to the king of Pergamus, and with "flattering speeches" having obtained his aid, he was quietly placed on the throne. This Antiochus assumed the name of Epiphanes, or Illustrious, but being "a vile person" in all respects, he was generally called Epimanes, or the madman. To raise money for the roman tribute, he deposed the pious high priest Onias, and sold the office, first to Jason the brother of Onias

for a yearly payment of 360 talents, and afterwards to his brother Menelaus for 660. He made war with the king of Egypt, invaded and conquered that country, took the monarch prisoner, and treated him with apparent friendship, but each contrived "to do mischief," Dan. 11. 27.

A false report of the death of Antiochus having prevailed, Jason attempted to recover the high priesthood by force, and slew many adherents of Menelaus. Antiochus concluding that the jewish nation had revolted, marched into Judea, took Jerusalem by storm, slew 40,000 of the inhabitants, sold vast numbers for slaves, plundered the temple of gold to the value of 800 talents, entered the holy of holies, caused a sow to be sacrificed on the altar, and sprinkled the temple with broth made from its flesh.

At this period the people of Alexandria made Physcon their king instead of his brother Philometer, who appeared to be wholly under the influence of Antiochus. The latter invaded Egypt, but withdrew, expecting that the civil war between the brothers would place the whole kingdom at his disposal. They, however, agreed to reign peaceably together, on which Antiochus again invaded Egypt, but was obliged to withdraw, by the command of ambassadors sent from Rome, B. C. 168. The tyrant then vented his wrath on Jerusalem. His general entered the city on a sabbath, and all the men who did not escape by flight were massacred, and the women and children that remained were sold for slaves. The city was plundered, set on fire in several places, large portions of it demolished, and a strong fortress built to overawe the temple. Antiochus then issued a decree, commanding all his subjects to conform to the grecian idolatry. He sent one Athenæus to teach these rites to the jews, who, on his arrival at Jerusalem, was assisted by some apostates. All sacrifices now ceased, the religious observances of the nation were suppressed, the temple again polluted, circumcision and the observance of the sabbath forbidden, all the copies of the law that could be found were destroyed, and the temple dedicated to Jupiter, whose image was erected on the great altar, a smaller altar being built thereon before the image. Every one who opposed these proceedings, or disobeyed the mandate of Antiochus, was put to death.

Similar measures were carried into effect through the land, and the jews were compelled to join the idolatrous rites and processions of the heathens. The church of God now suffered a more severe measure of persecution than in any former period—far more severe than even egyptian bondage. The jewish religion and nation seemed about to be rooted out, but at the darkest hour God interposed for his people, and, as in former times, raised up deliverers from among them.

One of the syrian officers named Apelles, came to the city of Modin, where dwelt an aged, honourable, and truly pious priest, named Mattathias, of a family called Asmonæans. He had five sons, all devout, able, and valiant men, named Johanan, Simon, Judas, Eleazar, and Jonathan. Being required to obey the mandate of the syrian monarch, Mattathias publicly declared that nothing should ever induce himself or his family to forsake the law of their God; and seeing an apostate jew about to sacrifice to an idol, filled with zeal, like that of Phineas, he slew him. With the assistance of his sons and their friends, he rushed upon Apelles and his attendants, and slew them also. He then assembled all who were zealous for the Divine law, and retired with them into the mountainous parts of the country. One company, to the number of 1000, took refuge in a cave, where the syrian governor of Jerusalem found them, and taking advantage of their being unwilling even to act in their own defence upon the sabbath, he, on that day, attacked them, and destroyed the whole body without resistance. This drew the attention of Mattathias and his associates to the question, and they resolved to defend themselves upon the sabbath.

Antiochus, hearing of these events, went to Jerusalem B. C. 167, and there enforced the execution of his decrees with great cruelty. On that occasion, Eleazar was martyred, and a mother with her seven sons; the affecting detail of their sufferings is recorded by Josephus and by the author of the second book of Maccabees. After the departure of Antiochus, Mattathias came from his fastnesses, and being joined by many of the most zealous of the jews, who were called the chasidim or asideans, he found himself at the head of a small army. With his followers he went round

the cities of Judah, destroying the idol altars, causing the children to be circumcised, and putting to death the apostates and persecutors. He also restored the service of the true God, and caused the law to be again read, making diligent search for all copies which had escaped the hands of the syrians. Passages from the prophets were also introduced into the synagogue service. Mattathias being of a very advanced age, was soon worn out by the fatigues of this service, and died B. C. 166; but his loss was compensated by his son Judas, who took the command. His followers soon increasing to an army, he went forth to fight the enemies of Israel. The motto on his standard was Exod. 15. 11, "Who is like unto thee among the gods, O Jehovah." The original words are, *Mi Camoka Baalim Jehovah*, the initial letters of which being combined, formed the artificial word *Maccabi*, hence the family of Mattathias and those who joined them were called Maccabees, Judas receiving the name Maccabeus, as a mark of pre-eminence. The appellation was also given to other jews who suffered martyrdom, both in later and earlier times.

At this period Antiochus was engaged in celebrating an impious, vain, and disgraceful festival at Daphne, and Judas continued to visit the cities of Judea, and free them from the evils and pollutions introduced by the heathen. While thus engaged he encountered and vanquished Apollonius, and afterwards another of the generals of Antiochus. That monarch enraged at these proceedings, assembled a large army, intending utterly to destroy the jewish nation, but having squandered all his treasure in the vain shows already mentioned, his proceedings were delayed. A revolt also took place in his eastern dominions. Antiochus then divided his forces. He sent half into Judea under the command of Lysias, while he proceeded into Persia with the remainder. Judas and his brethren met and overcame the syrians in several encounters; on one occasion so sure were the syrians of success, that a thousand merchants had attended their camp, ready to purchase the jews who they doubted not would be made captive. At last Judas defeated Lysias himself, who led his forces in person. The maccabees then

regained possession of Jerusalem, where Judas purified and repaired the temple with its courts, erected a new altar instead of that which the heathen had profaned. He rebuilt much of the city which had been laid in ruins. He restored the sacrifices and devotional observances, and celebrated this deliverance by a festival, the yearly feast of the dedication.

Antiochus was returning from an unsuccessful expedition in Persia, when he was informed of the proceedings and success of the maccabees. Filled with rage he threatened utterly to destroy the whole jewish nation, and to make Jerusalem a vast burial place. While on his journey, and uttering these proud threats, he was attacked by severe internal pains, but still continuing his wrath, he compelled his charioteer to hasten forward, when the vehicle being overturned, he was sorely hurt, and was carried in a litter to a town called Tabæ, where he remained suffering the most horrible torments, both of body and mind, till he died, after acknowledging the wickedness of his proceedings towards the jews. This took place, B. C. 164.

Antiochus Eupator, his son, a child, succeeded to the throne. Lysias, who conducted the government, endeavoured, but without success, to subdue the jews, who under Judas Maccabeus successfully resisted the syrians for several years, and also overcame the idumæans, and some other neighbouring nations. He not only repelled their invasions, but destroyed many of their fortresses, and in every way prevailed against them till his death, which took place in battle with the syrians, who surprised him while at the head of only a small body of men, B. C. 161. His brothers, Jonathan and Simon, succeeded to the government, and the romans having interfered in behalf of the jews, which was the result of an embassy sent to Rome by Judas, the nation enjoyed an interval of peace. Jonathan was appointed high priest, B. C. 152, by Alexander Bala, an impostor that prevailed against Demetrius, who being a son of Seleucus had obtained the kingdom of Syria and dethroned Antiochus Eupator, a few years before. The neighbouring nations continuing in an unsettled state, the jews remained unmolested, and Jonathan obtained the removal of the heathen garrison from the fortress of Jerusalem.

In B. c. 144, Jonathan was murdered by Tryphon, a pretender to the syrian throne; and Simon, who succeeded him, was murdered by his son-in-law in 135, being succeeded by his son John Hyrcanus. The syrians again brought Judea under their yoke, but their power being broken by the destruction of their army in Parthia, the jews under Hyrcanus recovered their independence, which they maintained during the revolutions that followed in Syria and weakened the power of that kingdom. Hyrcanus conquered the idumæans, and obliged them to become proselytes to the jewish religion. By a treaty with the romans, he obtained greater privileges for his nation than they had ever enjoyed before. He also took Samaria, and left Judea prosperous at his death, B. c. 107.

Aristobulus, his eldest son, succeeded to the throne, and was the first jew that assumed the regal diadem. He manifested a cruel disposition, causing even his mother and a brother to be put to death, but he died after reigning only one year. His brother Alexander subdued the philistines, and conquered the moabites, ammonites, and others, and died in 79, after a troubled reign, of a disease brought on by intemperance. His widow reigned nine years, supported by the pharisees, who had become a powerful political party. A civil contest ensued between her sons Hyrcanus and Aristobulus, the latter being supported by many who were opposed to the pharisees. The result was the interference of the romans, who decided in favour of Hyrcanus, though first applied to by his brother. Judea was then reduced to its original limits, and made tributary to Rome. Pompey was the roman general under whom this was effected, B. c. 63. He spared the sacred treasures, but entered into the holy of holies, after which intrusion, it was remarked, he never prospered. Crassus, not long after, pillaged the temple of a large treasure, when on the way to his fatal parthian expedition. Hyrcanus and Aristobulus continued opposed to each other till B. c. 47, when Julius Cesar made Antipater, a crafty idumæan who had supported Hyrcanus, the procurator or civil governor of Judea, and confirmed Hyrcanus in the high priesthood. After the death of Antipater, his son Herod, called the Great, obtained the kingly power, by the

assistance of the romans under Antony, B. c. 37, and governed with considerable ability, but manifested much tyranny and cruelty. He was confirmed in his power by Octavius Cesar, who afterwards assumed the imperial dignity, and under whom the fourth universal monarchy was established, and the nations brought into a state of peace to an extent perhaps never before known.

Under Herod Judea prospered in many respects, and enjoyed much peace and quietness, although his cruelties towards many of his subjects and even his own family were such, that the emperor Augustus is said to have exclaimed, that it was better to be Herod's hog than his son. These actions are stated by *Lardner*. When Herod had gained possession of Jerusalem by the assistance of the romans, and his rival Antigonus was taken prisoner, Herod, by a large sum of money, persuaded Antony to put him to death, lest he should revive his pretensions as one of the asmonæan family. Aristobulus, brother of his wife Mariamne, was murdered by his direction at eighteen years of age, because the people at Jerusalem had shown some affection for his person. He put to death Hyrcanus, the grandfather of Mariamne, then eighty years of age, and who had saved Herod's life when prosecuted by the sanhedrim; a man who, in his youth and in the vigour of his life, and in all the revolutions of his fortune, had shown a mild and peaceable disposition. His unhappy wife Mariamne was publicly executed, and her mother Alexandra, soon after. Alexander and Aristobulus, his two sons by Mariamne, were strangled in prison by his order, upon groundless suspicions, as it seems, when they were at man's estate, were married, and had children. His eldest son, Antipater, he put to death, only a few days before his own decease. This, however, was not without cause, he having conspired to poison his father. Almost all these executions and cruelties arose from Herod's state jealousy and love of power, and he laid a plan for destroying all the chief men of Judea, immediately after his own decease, that, as he told his sister and her husband, "all Judea might mourn at his death." These orders were not executed.

Herod's attachment to the romans was shown in many circumstances inconsist-

ent with the jewish religion, while the care and expense with which he caused the temple to be rebuilt, show his desire to obtain popularity among the jews, and certainly, as a nation, the jews enjoyed a greater degree of peace, and for a longer interval, under Herod's government, than during some centuries preceding. But these and other matters connected with Herod rather engage our attention as connected with a subsequent portion of the holy scripture, as in the reign of this monarch, our blessed Lord entered the world in human form, in the year 4, B. C. according to the best calculations. Thus was the reign of a profligate and cruel tyrant made the appointed period for the birth of Him who came to give his life a ransom for many. One of the later acts of Herod was the massacre of the children at Bethlehem, in the hope of including the promised King of the jews among their number.

In conclusion, it may be remarked,

that an attentive reader of the history of the period, the leading events of which alone have been here briefly noticed, will manifestly see that all these changes and troubles, these great shakings and revolutions of the nations, were to prepare the way for the coming of Christ, so that the world might be in that state in which his gospel would have free course and be glorified.

To use the words of *J. Edwards*, "Thus the world, after it had been, as it were, in a continual convulsion for so many hundred years together—like the four winds striving together on the tumultuous raging ocean, whence arose the four great monarchies—was now established in the greatest height of the fourth and last monarchy, and settled in quietness. Now all things are ready for the birth of Christ. This remarkable universal peace, after so many ages of tumult and war, was a fit prelude for the entrance into the world of the glorious Prince of peace."

CANAAN, PALESTINE, OR THE HOLY LAND.

Canaan, Palestine, or the Holy Land, is a district of Syria, comprehended between the thirty-first and thirty-fourth degrees of north latitude, and reaches from thirty-four and a half to thirty-seven degrees of east longitude. It is bounded on the north by the mountains of Libanus and Antilibanus; on the east by the desert of Syria; on the south by Arabia Petræa and the desert of Suez; and on the west by the Mediterranean sea. This once fertile and happy spot was called the land of Canaan, or Chanaan, from Noah's grandson; also Palestine from the philistines; and various other names are applied in scripture to the whole or parts of this region, as the Land of Promise, the Land of Israel, &c. After the return of the jews from the babylonish captivity, a portion of it was called Judea, and that name was afterwards applied to the whole territory. Among greek and roman authors it has received many different names, as Palestina Syria, Cælo-Syria, Phœnicia, and others.

The advantages of the soil and climate were such as to maintain, in the happiest periods of the jewish people, an immense population. Under David and Solomon the kingdom exceeded the limits already named. Solomon had dominion over all the region on the western side of the Euphrates, from Thiphsah, or Thapsacus, on that river, to Azza or Gaza. Tadmor in the wilderness, (Palmyra,) which he built, 2 Chron. 8. 4, is only a day's journey from the Euphrates; and Hamath, still called Hamah, near which Solomon had several "store cities," is seated on the Orontes. His kingdom included on the east and south-east the country of Moab, that of the ammonites, and Edom, together with some tracts of pasturage still further eastward. The population, in the time of David, amounted, on the lowest estimate, to five millions, besides the tributary canaanites, and other conquered nations. At the period when our Lord was upon

earth Palestine was divided into five provinces, Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Perea, and Idumea, under the dominion of the romans.

Jerusalem, after its final destruction by Titus, A. D. 71, remained desolate and almost uninhabited, till the emperor Hadrian colonized it. The empress Helena, in the fourth century, set the example of repairing in pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and the country became enriched by the crowds of devotees, who flocked there. In the beginning of the seventh century, it was overrun by the saracens, who held it till Jerusalem was taken by the crusaders in the twelfth. The latin kingdom of Jerusalem continued for about eighty years, during which much christian and saracen blood was shed in the Holy Land. In 1187, Judea was conquered by the sultan Saladin; on the decline of his kingdom it passed through various revolutions, and in 1317 became a part of the turkish empire. Such have been the changes in the country promised by the Lord of all to "the seed of Abraham," which in accordance with this promise, was assigned by Him as the habitation and inheritance of his chosen people, and which they retained till they forfeited it by their disobedience. It was "a land flowing with milk and honey," and so distinguished by fertility, and beauty, and the Divine presence and benediction, as to be "the glory of all lands;" a country honoured as the residence of the Saviour "manifested in the flesh," and as the scene of his labours, instructions, sufferings, and death. Such are the changes which it has undergone, in the mysterious and retributive providence of God.

The inhabitants of Palestine at the present day consist of turks, syrians, bedouin arabs, jews, latin, greek, and armenian christians, copts, and druses; the turks occupy all the civil and military posts. If its prevailing character correspond but little with its ancient fertility,

this difference may be in part ascribed to some physical changes, but rather to the Divine curse upon the land for the sins of the Jewish nation. We may also notice the miserable state in which its inhabitants are held, together with the devastating effects of perpetual wars, which render property insecure, and cultivation irregular and uncertain. Those writers who have represented it as barren, must be understood as referring chiefly to the mountainous districts round Jerusalem; many other parts of the country, if not the greater portion, appear to be still capable of producing great abundance. The land described in ancient times as "flowing with milk and honey," still, in many places, answers to this description; for it contains extensive pasture grounds of the richest quality, and the rocky country is covered with aromatic plants, yielding to the wild bees, who hive in the hollows of the rocks, such abundance of honey as to supply the poorer classes with an article of food. Delicious wine is still produced in some districts, and the valleys bear plentiful crops of wheat, barley, and millet. The western side of the central ridge is much more productive than the eastern. The palm-trees which yielded a precious balsam, known as the balm of Gilead, are not now cultivated in Palestine, though they are found in Arabia.

The climate is generally mild and salubrious, varying, however, considerably in different parts, in proportion as the country is more or less rocky or hilly.

The wilder animals noticed in the scripture as abounding in this country, have mostly disappeared. The maritime districts appear tolerably free from noxious reptiles and venomous insects; but the interior abound with them. Two species of the vulture, two of the falcon and of the quail, and various other birds, are still found in the country, and game is abundant.

The Jordan, flowing almost constantly southward, divides Palestine into two parts. The plain of Esdraelon on the west, fifty miles in length, and twenty in breadth, is one vast meadow covered with the richest pastures. It is surrounded by the mountains, and not a tree or a house is to be discovered in it. The district of ancient Samaria lies to the south of Galilee; it is mountainous, but tolerably cultivated and flourishing. Judea Proper extends from the Dead sea to the Mediterranean, and is composed of a rising range of limestone hills. Between Jaffa and Gaza, westward of Judea, lies the plain of the Mediterranean, the ancient territory of the Philistines. It still bears the name of Phalastin.

Jerusalem is seated on a rocky mountain, every way to be ascended (except a little on the north) with steep ascents, and deep valleys naturally fortified; for the most part environed with other not far removed mountains, as if placed in the midst of an amphitheatre. But the Jerusalem of sacred history is, in fact, no more. Not a vestige remains of its primitive state; not a monument of Jewish times is standing within its walls. The very course of its boundaries is changed, and the limits of the ancient city are become doubtful. When the stranger beholds its walls levelled, its ditches filled up, and all its buildings embarrassed with ruins, he can scarcely believe he views that celebrated metropolis which formerly withstood the efforts of the most powerful empires, and, for a time, resisted the arms of Rome itself; though, by a singular change of feeling, its mouldering edifices now receive her superstitious homage and reverence.

Dr. Richardson says, a few gardens still remain on the sloping base of mount Zion, watered from the pool of Siloam; the gardens of Gethsemane are still in a sort of ruined cultivation; the fences are broken down, and the olive trees decaying, as if the hand that dressed and fed them were withdrawn; the mount of Olives still retains a languishing verdure, and nourishes a few of those trees from which it derives its name; but all round about Jerusalem the general aspect is blighted and barren; the grass is withered; the bare rock looks through the scanty sward; and the grain itself, like the staring progeny of famine, seems in doubt whether to come to maturity, or die in the ear. The vine that was brought from Egypt is cut off from the midst of the land; the vineyards are wasted; the hedges taken away; the graves of the ancient dead are open and tenantless. Other travellers have given a more pleasing account of the city, and particularly of their first impressions on beholding it; but all concur in the disappearance of every thing Jewish in its aspect, even though they approached it with the strongest recollections of its former history.

Mount Zion is now literally "ploughed as a field," Mic. 3. 12. The valley of Jehoshaphat stretches between the eastern wall of the city and the mount of Olives. In this valley are contained a great variety of objects, to which allusion is made in the sacred writings. At the bottom of the valley is a bridge of a single arch thrown across the channel of the brook Kedron. The vale itself has been always used as a burying-place by the Jews; and numerous monuments are scattered through its whole extent, but many of them in ruins: those most distinguished are the tombs of Zachariah, Absalom, and Jehoshaphat. Near the first, which is a square mass of a rock, hewn down into form, is mount Moriah, the site of the temple, but within the walls of the city.

The *Dead sea* is to the south-east of Jerusalem, and nearly twelve miles to the east of Hebron. This remarkable lake, called the Salt sea, and the lake Asphaltites, and by the Arabs the sea of Lot, extends in length seventy miles, and in breadth nineteen, according to Josephus; modern travellers make its dimensions less, and it may have been contracted by the drying up of its shores. It covers the site of Sodom and Gomorrah, and other "cities of the plain," destroyed by the judgment on their guilty inhabitants, Gen. 19. 24. Seven considerable streams, and among them the river Jordan, discharge waters into this basin. The mountains of Judea form one side of this lake, and the black precipitous rocks of Arabia the other. Of the latter it is said that "the smallest bird of heaven could not find among these crags a single blade of grass for its sustenance." The water of this sea is heavier than any other, its specific gravity being 1.211. It holds in solution magnesia, soda, muriate of lime, and sulphate of lime, and deposits its salts so readily, that if clothes be wetted with it, they are, when dried, covered with a thick coating of these minerals. The taste of the water is both salt and bitter; there are but few, if any, fish in this lake; and some assert that those carried into it by the rapidity of the Jordan, almost instantly perish in its acrid waves. The bitumen supplied by this singular basin affords means of subsistence to a considerable number of Arabs who frequent its shores.

The Jordan, the largest stream in Palestine, and the only one deserving the name of a river, is, as far as it extends, the eastern boundary of the Holy Land, although many places of importance

in sacred history lie beyond it. It rises in mount Libanus, and flows nearly from north to south through the lake of Tiberias, and onward to the Dead sea. There are various accounts as to the breadth of the river, arising from its being measured at different seasons; opposite to Jericho it is usually fifty or sixty feet across. The Old Testament has frequently allusions to the "swellings of Jordan;" but, at present, whether the current has deepened its channel, or whether the climate is less moist than formerly, this occurrence is seldom witnessed. There are two banks, and the inner may be overflowed, while the outer is above the stream. Its margin continues, as of old, to be covered with a natural forest of tamarisk, willows, oleanders, and similar trees, and affords a retreat to wild beasts. Hence the prophet Jeremiah assimilates an enraged enemy to a lion coming up "from the swellings of Jordan," driven from his lair by the annual flood, and compelled to seek shelter in the surrounding desert.

The sea or lake of Tiberias, called also the sea of Galilee, and the lake of Gennesareth, is computed to be between seventeen and eighteen miles in length, and from five to six in breadth. The mountains on the east come close to its shore, and the country on that side has not a very agreeable aspect; on the west it has the plains of Tiberias, Hutin, and Gennesareth; to the north and south is a plain country or valley. There is a current throughout the whole breadth of the lake, and the passage of the Jordan through it is easily discernible by its smoothness. Yet, though its appearance is grand, the barren aspect of the mountains on each side, and the absence of wood, give a dulness to the picture, increased by the silence which reigns through its whole extent, where not a boat or vessel of any

kind is now to be found. It is subject to whirlwinds and sudden gusts from the mountains, by which small vessels would be greatly endangered. A storm thus produced is plainly referred to in the gospel narrative, "There came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind, and the raging of the water; and they ceased, and there was a calm," Luke 8. 23, 24. The chief interest of this lake is derived from the various incidents described in the evangelical records, as having taken place upon it, on different occasions, during the ministry of our Lord.

Mount Carmel, on which Elijah sacrificed when the great question was decided between himself and the prophets of Baal, is one of a range of mountains which extend southward from the bay of Acre as far as Cesarea. It is now chiefly remarkable as a mass of barren and desolate rocks. Its sides are indeed graced by some native cedars, and even the brambles are still intermingled with wild vines and olives, denoting its ancient fertility, or more careful cultivation; but there are no longer any rich pastures, to recall the beauty of Carmel and of Sharon. It owes to its name and to its prominent situation on the coast, as a sentinel of the Holy Land, all the interest which can now be claimed for a spot so hallowed in the recollection of Divine manifestations. On the summit of the hill stands a monastery, long the principal residence of the carmelite friars, but now entirely abandoned.

The principal natural features of the land of Palestine have thus been briefly noticed. To give an account of the present appearance of its towns and cities would exceed our limits, and detail particulars which have not much reference to scripture history.

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THE HOLY BIBLE

HENRY AND SCOTT.

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FROM
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WITH NUMEROUS OBSERVATIONS AND NOTES FROM OTHER
WRITERS.

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